

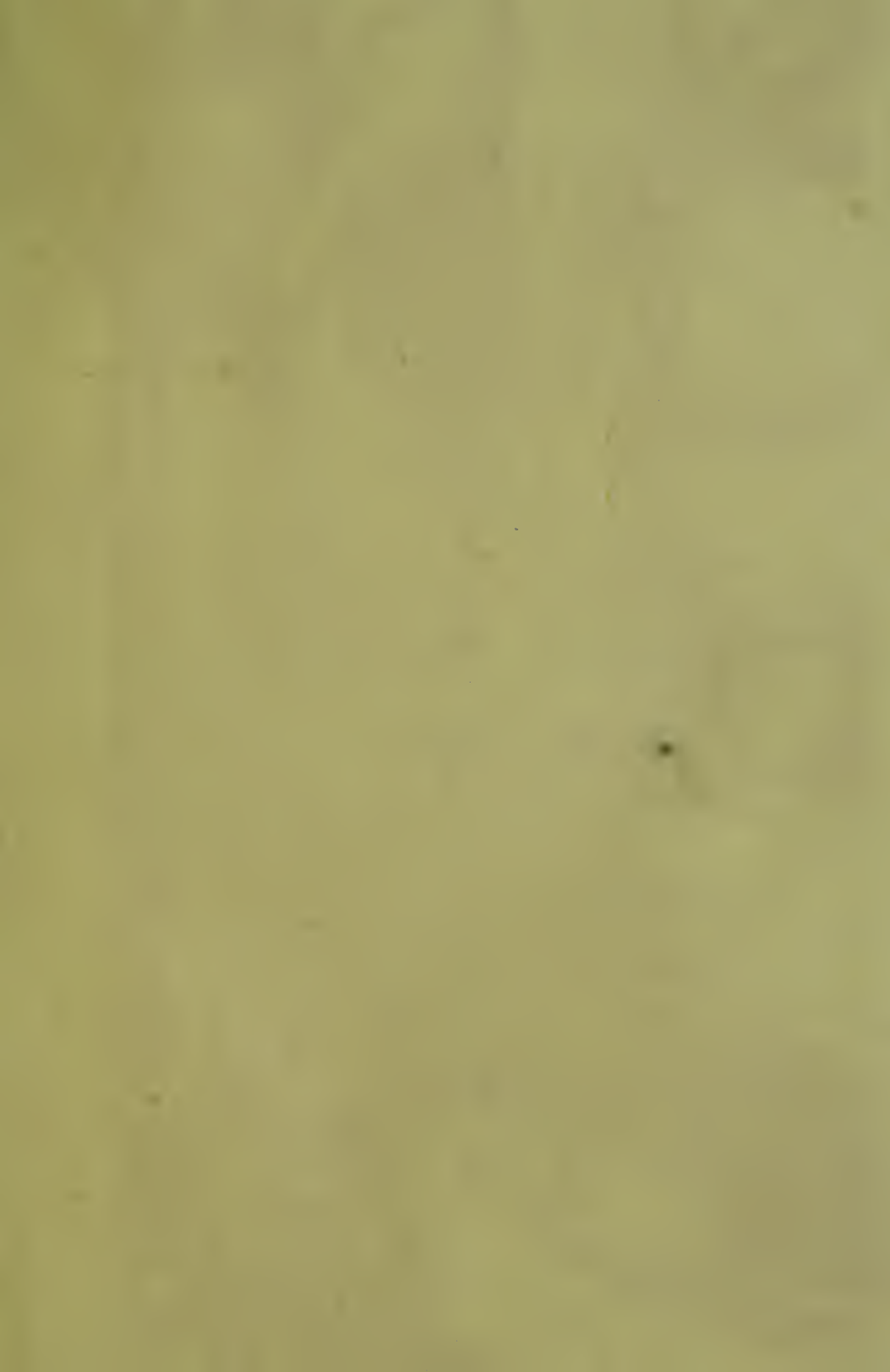


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FRANK RALEIGH OF WATERCOMBE.



FRANK RALEIGH

OF WATERCOMBE.

A TALE OF SPORT, LOVE, AND ADVENTURE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"WOLF-HUNTING IN BRITTANY," ETC.

"Gaudet equis, canibusque, et aprici gramine campi,
Cereus in vitium flecti, monitoribus asper,
Utilium tardus provisor, prodigus aris,
Sublimis, cupidusque, et amata relinquere pernix."

HOR.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1877.



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FRANK RALEIGH OF WATERCOMBE.

CHAPTER I.

“Quoth Ralpho, You mistake the matter ;
For all th’ Antiquity you smatter,
Is but a *Riding* used of course,
When the Grey Mare’s the better Horse.”

HUDIBRAS.

THE town clock of Buckbury had already struck twelve when Frank, mounted on Casket, the thin-skinned, broken-down racer, whose bare knees and shivered fore-legs had apparently quite enough to do to carry her own weight, picked his way very gingerly over the hard stones till he had fairly cleared the precincts of the town. Impatiently and almost thoughtlessly he then stuck both spurs into the mare’s ribs, an outrage the game old beast instantly resented by a

succession of plunges and kicks which, if not secure in his saddle, would have certainly exacted speedy retribution from the offending rider. However, finding it not repeated, she just cleared her pipes with an angry snort or two, and then, throwing up her deer-like head high in the air, away she went at a pace so sewent and so rapid that the very hedges appeared to Frank's eyes to be running a race in an opposite direction, till his brain almost reeled at the sight.

The road, like most roads in Devonshire, was an up-and-down-hill one the whole way to Buddleford; yet never for one second did the old mare attempt either to slacken her speed or even change a leg, till Frank pulled her up within a few yards of the blacksmith's forge on the outskirts of that village.

"Never threw my leg over a better animal in my life," said he, dismounting from her back, and addressing a moor farmer who, leading a young unshod colt in a halter, had arrived at the same moment near the smithy door.

"Her com'th of a gude havage, I zee," replied the farmer, running his eye, with

the air of a connoisseur, from her thin, dilated nostrils down to the long quarters and fine featherlocks of her hind legs; "but her's one o' the has-beens, I zim—a bit long in the tooth; and ef the Squire mean'th breeding from her, the zoonder he do'th it the better. Leastways, that's my opinion, thoff I may be wrong. But cri-massy, Master Frank! the tail of her shak'th like a dishwasher's."

"No wonder!" said Frank, referring to his watch. "She seemed to fly over the road, and has brought me from Buckbury toll-bar to this place in something under twelve minutes. The mare really belongs to Mr. Host; but he has promised to give her to Tom French for next season; so he'll be splendidly mounted, won't he? But where's the groom? and what on earth has become of the blacksmith?" exclaimed Frank, aghast on discovering, as he entered the smithy, that neither of the twain were present; nor, by the scarcely perceptible thread of smoke issuing from the dying embers, could the latter have been at work for at least an hour. There, indeed, stood his horse, hitched up to a

crook in the pent-house; but he was still unshod, and consequently not available for immediate use.

Here, then, was a fresh quandary, and again he was at his wits' end what next to do. The delay of even a few minutes would be fatal to him. His father would not fail to discover his absence, as well as that of the colt, and then a row would follow, the result of which, as affecting Joe Langworthy, filled him with the utmost concern and apprehension. He had promised that groom to be back at Watercombe before luncheon; but it was now half-past twelve o'clock, and, although his father rarely returned from the magistrates' meeting before two, it was next to impossible that he could reach home by that time, unless, indeed, he could mount his horse and start off at that instant.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, and Farmer Wakeham had confessed his utter inability to account for the absence of the blacksmith, the sound of a rough horn, followed by harsh and discordant music, suddenly attracted their attention. Then there was the shout of a mob, men's, women's, and

children's voices commingling with the din as it rose, with peals of laughter, from the village green in the vale below.

"Begorz!" exclaimed Wakeham, with a merry twinkle in his eye, "there's a Skymaton going on down to Buddleford, if ever I heered one; and that's where the blacksmith's a go. Us must go tew, Maester Frank; 'tis a faine meg, sure enow, and I widn't lost zeeing o't, nit for a crown."

"As well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb," thought Frank, as he resigned himself to the inevitable fate that seemed to follow and frustrate every scheme of his in connection with his visits to Heathercote. "I fear 'tis no use waiting for the blacksmith," he said, hesitatingly, "while that uproar is going on in the village."

"Nit a farden o' use. Dick Trant blow'th the horn at Skymaton most times, and tell'th up who's to blame and what they've a doed to arn sitch a lectur'. Bless'ee! Dick's Cap'n to the comp'ny, spak'th out like a stage-actor, and widn't go to work now, naw, nit for a guinea a nail."

This information dispelling all doubt from

Frank's mind, he at once agreed to accompany Wakeham and see the fun, which, although enacted occasionally in the surrounding villages, was a novelty that as yet he had never witnessed. So, securing their respective steeds to two of the many crooks that studded the walls of the smithy, they trotted off together and quickly joined the motley crowd.

Painfully grating and discordant was the concert that now assailed their ears. In the front of the throng appeared Dick Trant, mounted on a donkey, but with his face grotesquely turned towards the animal's tail. In his right fist, which was big and heavy as a sledge-hammer, he grasped a rough cow-horn, and ever and anon applying it to his lips, produced so vile a blast that Frank declared his teeth were set as much on edge by it as if he had eaten a crab-apple.

Then came the proclamation of the culprit's crime, which the blacksmith, as herald, yelled out with the lungs of a Stentor; and following it uprose the din and laughter of the crowd in a wild chorus, supported by instruments consisting chiefly of tin kettles, fire-

shovels and tongs, saucepans, frying-pans, and coal-scuttles, drummed on by pokers and pincers imported from the blacksmith's forge.

A shrewish-looking woman, representing the culprit being thus escorted, was quaintly bedizened with ribbons of every hue. Her cheeks, painted blood-red, betokened her fiery nature; while, gesticulating furiously with her arms, she was borne in a chair, fitted with poles, aloft in the centre of the crowd.

Passing on to the end of the village, the whole party entered the combe leading up to John Mumford's house; and now it was that Frank first discovered who the real victim was, and what had been the delinquency that gave rise to this public exposure. A serious matrimonial squabble, ending in a fight, had taken place at Honeycombe between Mrs. Mumford and the long-suffering, hen-pecked man designated by courtesy as her "maister," but whose claim to that title the neighbours knew to be mere moonshine.

The old feud about the foxes had broken out with fresh rancour between the pair; and the high-spirited little virago, having lost a whole brood of full-grown turkeys, had not

only exhausted her long vocabulary of vile epithets on John Mumford's head, but had resorted to revenge, in the shape of poison, with which she hoped to destroy every fox on that side of the moor.

The foxes, however, were far too cunning to be caught by her; they escaped with their lives; "the dog it was that died:" the faithful "Shepherd,"—companion, friend, and real helpmate to John Mumford—picked up the poisoned meat, and, before a remedy could be administered, shivered and fell dead in the field at his master's feet. This was more than even he could bear; the last straw that broke down the domestic tyranny under which he had so long groaned. He lifted the dog tenderly in his arms, carried him home and deposited him on the floor in front of a table at which his wife sat making dumplings for the day's dinner.

"There," he said, bitterly, "that's your work; you've a murdered that dog, you have; and if you'd a tookt it yoursel' (meaning the poison), I shouldn't a found the want of ee, nit half zo mitch."

At this insult the little fury's eyes abso-

lutely flashed fire; her utterance was choked, and, instead of fulminating forth her usual charge of hard words, she hurled the rolling-pin with all her force straight at Mumford's head; protected by his hat, however, and a tolerably thick skull of his own, the weapon glanced off, and did little or no damage beyond leaving a trifling mark on the bruised skin.

"Awh! that's yeur game, is it?" he said, very deliberately; "well, tew can play at that, and I'll zee if I can't larn ee better manners avore I've a done with thee."

He then seized her firmly round the waist, carried her to the porch door, as a dog would carry a struggling rat, and, dropping her beyond the lintel, thrust her out, but without violence, into the midst of a lot of pigs, which, at that moment, were squealing for their food in the farmyard. "There, 'bide 'long wi' they, ef yeu've a lost yeur raison; that be the right comp'ny vor sitch as yeu be to kip." Having said this he re-entered the door, slammed it behind him, and turned the key.

Loud and piercing were the shrieks the

little spitfire uttered at this treatment; nor did she cease for an instant from banging the door with a heavy pike-handle and upbraiding her husband in the most vituperative terms, till an Irish packman, with his bundle of handkerchiefs and linen on his back, appeared at her side and expressed his immediate readiness to lend her any help that lay in his power.

He was a sturdy, thick-set fellow was Dennis O'Hagan, and, like many a Milesian, possessing the spirit of a true knight-errant, would rather have gone without his dinner for a whole year than fail to succour a woman in distress, whether invoked or not to espouse her cause.

"Open this door for me," she said to him piteously, "and let me into my own house; do ee, sir, that's a dear man."

"Be the powers, my lady, if 'tis Dinnis can do it, ye'll not be long on the outside of it!" responded the Irishman, thrusting the pike-handle under the door and making it heave and creak with the leverage.

Inside, however, stood John Mumford, the fiend waxing within him, as he heard the

man's voice and saw the hinges of his castle-door all but yielding to the strain. He was by no means a pugnacious character, nor under any amount of provocation could have been induced to strike a woman, his nature being far too manly for so cowardly an act ; but the harsh, guttural tones of the pedlar's tongue converted him, as if by magic, into a very gladiator. He threw open the door with a jerk, and, without giving the aggressor time even to put up his guard, his clenched fist fell with a smashing sound on the bridge of the Irishman's nose, drawing a crimson torrent from that organ, and hurling him back, half stunned, against the fragile form of his termagant wife.

Down they both went reeling together, the pedlar on his back, and Mrs. Mumford under him, in all the filth of the miry farmyard ; the latter, however, was on her feet again in an instant, and had she not lost one of her shoes in the fall, would probably have beaten a hasty retreat and escaped into the house. " Call yourself a man, John Mumford ! " she gasped out hysterically, as she groped about for the missing slipper ; " I call ee nort but a cussed mongrel ! "

By this time O'Hagan too had sprung upon his legs, and, undaunted by the tremendous blow that had just felled him to the earth, he rushed head foremost at his opponent, and catching him by the handkerchief of his throat, twisted it instantaneously so tightly that, in a few seconds more, suffocation must have been the inevitable result. Help, however, at that critical moment, came from a most unexpected source: Mrs. Mumford, seeing her husband's face growing livid under the vice-like grip of the pedlar, and forgetting her wrongs, seized the pike-handle, and with two or three smart strokes over his head compelled him to relax his hold and liberate her husband.

"Bedad!" exclaimed O'Hagan, "I'm kilt outright;" as finding two to one against him, he reeled back and declined to continue the unequal fight; "but I'll have the law av'ee both, ef I spend my last copper."

The poor fellow then picked up his pack, and although his frontispiece exhibited a frightful mass of contusion, both the eyes being all but closed, and a stream of blood still trickling over his chin, his locomotion

appeared none the worse for the encounter, as he made the best of his way for Buddleford, the nearest village in the vale below.

Taking refuge in the little wayside inn, where he and his pack were as well known as the country postman, the horrifying account of his damaged and blood-stained visage spread like wildfire through the hamlet; and when it was known by whom and for what offence he had been so cruelly treated, the indignation of the villagers knew no bounds. Long had the termagant conduct of Mrs. Mumford been a scandal in the neighbourhood, and now that this outrage had been perpetrated on a quiet and kind-hearted pedlar, whose sole object it was, however indiscreet, to help her, the black catalogue of her offences appeared to be complete.

Accordingly, with one voice, a Skymaton was called for by the whole community, and Dick Trant, the blacksmith, being appointed herald, was deputed at once to organize the concert and proclaim its object; that object being to expose the woman to public ridicule, and, if possible, to shame her into better ways.

The stocks, the pillory, and the ducking-stool, with other punishments for minor offences, have given way to the enlightenment of the age; but this equally ancient custom bids fair still to linger among us and to defy the advancing tide of modern civilization for many a year to come. Up to the present day instances of its vitality are occasionally witnessed, both in the North and West of England; but the term *Skymaton*, or *Skimmington*, is chiefly, if not exclusively, confined to the latter country, whereas, in the North, the custom is called "*Riding the Stang*," *i.e.*, riding the pole, the leader of the hubbub being mounted in a chair carried by poles, from which he proclaims the delinquency of the offender.

Butler, in the seventeenth century, describes the scene minutely in his "*Hudibras*":—

"And now the cause of all their fear
By slow degrees approached so near,
They might distinguish different noise,
Of horns and pans, of dogs and boys,
And kettle-drums, whose sullen dub
Sounds like the hooping of a tub;
And followed with a world of tall-lads,
That merry ditties troll'd, and ballads;

Next pans and kettles of all keys,
From trebles down to double base;
And at fit periods the whole rout
Set up their throats with clamorous shout."

In France the ceremony is still practised commonly in the provinces, under the name of "Charivari," and is conducted with rough music in much the same fashion as in our own country. In Germany, too, the concert is called cat-music—a very appropriate term, both for the clamour and the cause of it.

In Somersetshire, not far from Yeovil, a bas-relief representing the custom of "riding the Skimmety," as the country people there call it, decorates the hall of old Montacute House, that beautiful mediæval structure built by Sir Edward Phelips, Speaker of the House of Commons in the reign of Elizabeth. A short description of this bas-relief which, besides a singing-gallery and screen, occupies the upper end of that stately apartment, may not be uninteresting to those who, probably, have heard of this ancient punishment now for the first time. The scene, then, is thus depicted by the artist: On the left of the bas-relief a man is seen stooping over a beer-

barrel ; in one arm he is holding a baby, which has evidently been intrusted to his charge by his absent wife. In the mean time he has been drinking the beer, and, apparently in a state of intoxication, is about to draw more, as the hand of his other arm is extended towards the tap, and a cup to receive it stands underneath. But the wife returns, and finding him in this condition, rates him soundly ; then, while an altercation ensues between them, and she is whacking him with an old shoe, a third person, supposed to be the schoolmaster, from a scroll of paper in his hand, overhears the quarrel and reports it to the village. Then follows the procession, composed of men and women, nine of whom are carrying an effigy of the delinquent on a pole and proclaiming the matrimonial scandal to the surrounding crowd.

The date of this grotesque and unique bas-relief is probably coæval with that of the grand old mansion in which it is found ; and very similar in its object and characteristics was the scene witnessed by Frank on the present occasion. But the ludicrous part played by the actors, and the boisterous din

produced by the pots and pans, commingling with rustic wit and uproarious mirth, soon lost their charm of novelty when he bethought him of the pain it would inflict on John Mumford himself, his late liberal host, and, as a tenant farmer, the best friend to foxes on that side of the moor. So, hustling his way as he best could through the crowd, and placing himself alongside of Dick Trant and his donkey, he determined to do his utmost to save Mumford from the humiliation of being serenaded at his own door by this motley and tumultuous assemblage. He had not, however, forgotten the vicious kick in the ribs administered by Mrs. Mumford to the poor sheep-dog, whose untimely end had now brought their matrimonial life to so painful a crisis. So far then as it affected her, Frank would have little recked if the mob had tossed her in a blanket and then ducked her in a green horsepond—a punishment, in his opinion, not a whit too severe for so vile a termagant.

“John Mumford,” he said, edging up close to the herald, “is a great friend of the Squire’s, and I know he will feel very much

vexed if you lead this Skymaton on to Honeycombe; and I'll gladly give you a guinea out of my own pocket if you'll stop short and shoe my horse instead."

"Couldn't du it, Maester Frank, nit anyhow. Us a got a job in hand now, and must put he aside fust. 'Tis an old score, yeu zee, and 'tis time 'twas settled. Ef Betty Mumford dothn't know her duty, us must larn it her—leastwise, as the passon can't."

So saying, he applied the cow-horn to his lips, and inflating it with mighty effort, blew a blast so long and so harsh that it was almost a wonder his cheeks did not burst with the strain. Then, after some ribald and coarse allusion to the nether-garments befitting the costume of Betty Mumford, the crowd roared amain with laughter, and shouted to him to lead on up to the very doors of the delinquent.

Before, however, the procession had proceeded a hundred yards further in the direction of Honeycombe, a farm labourer of Mumford's brought word that his master and mistress had been summoned to appear before a full bench of magistrates at the George

Inn, to answer for the brutal assault perpetrated on the packman; and, moreover, that they were not expected to return to Honeycombe before nightfall. So Dick Trant again blew his horn, and, after explaining the inutility of serenading the mere walls of the house while the object of their visit was absent, he added: "But what us can't do to-day, us'll du to-morrow, and then gie her a full band and a proper tow-row."

The whole mob appeared to coincide at once with this arrangement, implying as it did a continuation of the ceremony on the following day at least, if not for a longer period. With an eye to business, however, as well as pleasure, the blacksmith, while turning his donkey round, took the opportunity of saying to Frank, in a subdued tone, "I'll vit a shoe on that hoss o' yourn, Maester Frank, avore an hour's over; and then, I zim, yeu'll zay, 'Dick Trant, you've a earned that guinea fairly.'"

"Not a bit of it," replied Frank, indignantly. "If you don't mean to let John Mumford off altogether, you won't see a farthing of my money beyond the value of

the shoe. You'd make him suffer for his wife's sins."

"Well, zo did Adam, as I've a heered tell; and if Betty wear'th the breeches, whose fault's that but John Mumford's, I should like to know?"

Seeing it was utterly useless to argue further with the man, whose sentiments appeared to give such unbounded satisfaction to those around him, Frank very discreetly held his tongue, hoping when his horse was being shod to prevail on him not to carry out the present programme to its bitter end. But, as he afterwards heard, his effort was useless. Honeycombe was invaded by the village mob for three days in succession, and the consequence was that, owing to the excitement caused by those visits on the brain of Mrs. Mumford, it was found necessary to remove her to a lunatic asylum, where she was detained for the remainder of her short life, during which she never ceased to be for one moment the most unmanageable maniac that had ever entered its dark portals.

With his four shoes on, his head towards home, and his ribs occasionally touched up

with a dig of the new rowels, the colt made short work of it between the blacksmith's forge and the stables at Watercombe. Over the broad waste of the mossy moor, sloping away seawards from the bogs above, and presenting a fine elastic turf for many a mile of ground, Frank felt as if Ganymede himself, borne by Jupiter's eagle, had never been carried in better form. Then again, as the well-bred and sure-footed beast, scarcely slacking his pace, but dashing boldly into the depths of some hollow combe, now carpeted with fallen leaves, and studded on every side with ferns of exquisite form and verdure, uprose again to bound over the steep declivity of the opposite hill, no porpoise glancing over the ocean waves could have surmounted the ups and downs of his liquid element with more delightful ease.

But joyous and exhilarating as the gallop was, Frank's quicksilver dropped to zero for some seconds when he remembered that this would probably be the last time he should cross his back for many a long day. Suddenly, however, a ray of hope broke in and again quickly restored it to its wonted high

level: the thought occurred to him that, probably, he might be able to persuade his father to let him take the colt with him to Oxford; and, as the hope grew stronger and stronger at every stride, onward he sped with wild delight up to the very gates of Watercombe.

So full was he of this anticipation, and so utterly had he forgotten the time to which he was bound, that when Joe Langworthy made his appearance at the stable-door Frank was fairly startled by the anxious and alarmed expression of the man's countenance. "Lor! Maester Frank," ejaculated the groom, brightening up as he spoke, "yeu be come at last, then; vor tew mortal hours I've a looked vor ee every minute in the hour! But there, yeu'm in gude time arter all; the Squire beant come yet."

"Hurrah, Joe! that's a bit of good news I did not expect—a turn of luck for once in my favour——"

"And mine, tew, I reckon," interrupted the groom, feeling the danger was over of which he stood so much in dread. "Postman brought word, zo Mathiss zays, that Farmer

Mumford and hes wife to Honeycombe be tootk up for murder and robbery, and be now standing their trial to the George Inn avore the bench; and zo far as he know'th, they'm likely to swing vor it, tew; zo us shan't zee the maester home, leastways avore they've a zettled that job one way or t'other."

"The postman's a fool, and so's Matthews, for believing him," said Frank, curtly. "John Mumford has only well thrashed an Irish pedlar for interfering in a quarrel between him and his wife; and served the fellow quite right, too, in my opinion. But look sharp, Joe, and get that colt straight as quickly as ever you can; for my fathar may return now at any moment: there, catch! that's the crown I promised you."

Such was the fine condition of the colt, however, that, although the sweat ran off him like rain, not a speck of lather appeared on his skin; his tail, indeed, gave unmistakable token of the pace at which he had been travelling, while his flanks quivered convulsively, as if agitated by an electric battery. All those symptoms, however, would soon pass off; and, under Joe's manipulation, not

a trace of them be seen in the short space of an hour, if only the Squire would delay his coming to that time.

But the fates were against it; Joe had scarcely deposited the crown-piece in his leathern pouch when, hearing a gate that opened on a bridle-path leading directly for the stables fall heavily against its post, he looked round and spied the Squire jogging along on King Cole at his usual hound-trot; but as he approached a stone watering-trough that always stood brimming over with the softest moor water, he paused a minute or so to indulge the old horse with a long and refreshing draught. Then, to Joe's unspeakable relief, he turned short and trotted briskly up the stately oak avenue, which, with its gnarled and moss-clad branches overlapping the road, formed a continuous Gothic arch from that point to the front of the house. The groom then knew that King Cole would be led to the stables, and that he should now have plenty of time to dress the colt and restore his skin to that glossy hue, which would render detection of the fatigue he had undergone impossible, even to the master's eye.

In the mean time Frank had rushed up to meet his father; and as the latter expatiated on the tedious business of the day, which, after all, ended in the dismissal of the case against the Mumfords, Lady Susan, seeing them enter together, happily made no inquiries as to Frank's absence during the rest of the day.

That night Mr. Raleigh, very contrary to his usual custom, sat up to a late hour over his jug of punch, which, to Matthews' serious discomfiture, he was called on to replenish more than once with a fresh and more potent brew. Hitherto Frank's migrations from home had been limited to the neighbouring town of Buckbury, an accessible distance at which, if need be, he could easily be visited by his father, or summoned to Watercombe at brief notice. But now it was altogether a different matter; the boy was going forth to assume the *toga virilis* and start on life's journey, subject to no control beyond that of his own good sense and right feeling to save him from debt and the many temptations incidental to a college career.

So the Squire, pondering anxiously on

these things, and loving his son as the very apple of his eye, sat up hour after hour in his easy chair, sipping the insidious mixture and devising all manner of schemes for the boy's protection; but, alas! without being able to choose one on which he could confidently rely. At length, in a state of semi-maudlin somnolency, in which his grief at parting with Frank was expressed by many a deep-drawn sigh and not a few tears, Matthews, who had brought in and lighted his bed-candle for the third time, overheard him saying aloud to himself, "He shall have the colt then, as he so much wishes it; and if hunting won't keep the boy out of mischief, nothing on earth will."

CHAPTER II.

“Never did I know
A creature, that did bear the shape of man,
So keen and greedy to confound a man.”

Merchant of Venice.

THE set of rooms known as No. 12, ground-floor to the left, being allotted to Frank in the Great Quadrangle of St. Columb's, he had scarcely taken possession of them above ten minutes, when his old friend and companion, Harry Somers, hearing of his arrival, rushed in and saluted him with a hearty welcome as a fellow-member of the same college.

“But I say, Frank,” he exclaimed, looking round him on the dingy walls and mutilated furniture, not a table nor a chair of which had a sound leg to stand upon, “your rooms are in an awful plight, and you surely won't be called upon to pay ‘thirds’ for all this

lumber—the wreck of ages, to judge from its antiquated and worm-eaten condition.”

“Every stick of it is paid for already, responded Frank. “The bursar managed that, suggesting that as the late owner was deeply in debt, prompt payment might save him from immediate arrest.”

“Then you’ve been shamefully robbed,” said his friend, indignantly; “for no broker will give you twopence for all this rickety rubbish; and you’ll be compelled to fresh-paper, fresh-carpet, and fresh-furnish the rooms throughout.”

“And then we shall all be fresh together,” added Frank, already aware of the mildly contemptuous epithet commonly applied to every novice during his first term.

The outgoing tenant of these rooms, as Frank learned from his scout, had been a noted bruiser, and had frequently engaged prize-fighters to set-to with gloves, and teach him and others the art of self-defence in these very apartments. Consequently, as might be expected, the four legs of the table stood at every possible angle under it except at a right angle; the chairs were held together by

splints and cord bandages, but for which, they would have collapsed under their own weight; patches of grease and spilt wine, the result of bacchanalian orgies, defiled the tattered carpet; while the blood-sprinkled paper exhibited unmistakable proof of the rough work enacted within those four walls.

The set of rooms, consisting of a large sitting-room, a bedroom, a scout's pantry, and a study, four in number, were amply commodious for the most luxurious bachelor; but the condition of all being equally bad, Frank was at once impressed with the necessity, if he must live in them, of applying forthwith to an upholsterer and giving him *carte blanche* to furnish and decorate the suite without any delay.

"Look there, sir," said the scout, a bloated, sottish-looking fellow, called Potts, who had been told off to wait upon Frank and had just entered the rooms; "look at that trap-door in the ceiling of the study" (very inappropriately called by that name); "what do you think lived up in those premises, sir?"

"Rats, I should think," said Frank, "by the foul, scratchy look of the place."

“No, sir, never a rat. That’s where my late master used to keep a fox ; and when he wanted to show his friends a bit of sport, or try the pluck of a new terrier, he’d put him in at that hole, and then you’d a thought the ceiling was a coming down, by the scurry and fighting that took place. Sometimes, if the fox was best man, the dog would tumble out stern foremost and almost break his back ; but if he was a hard-mouthed un, down would come the fox like a lamplighter, and away to go straight for the chimney-flue, out of which there was no way of bundling him but one.”

“And that, of course, was by lighting the fire and smoking him out,” interposed Frank.

“Not a bit of it, sir. We tried that game with one fox, and smothered him outright ; so after that I had to run and fetch a sweep, who, for half-a-crown down, would swarm the flue and fix the lash of master’s hunting-thong to the fox’s hind leg, and then we soon bagged him again in a cloud of soot.”

“And did your master call that sport ?” inquired Frank, indignantly. “I call it pure low ruffianism, treating one of the most

gallant animals in the creation in so brutal a way. I wonder the poor beast didn't go mad and bite some of you. He must have been frightfully begrimed, too, after such maltreatment."

"You would have said so, sir, if you'd a had the washing of him, as I had. Of all the okkardest jobs I ever had the handling of, that was the worst and no mistake; and if I hadn't a done it, Mr. Penmark would have thought no more of punching my head and knocking me into next week than you would of knocking down a carrion crow. Oh! he was a awful man as ever I see in all my life."

"And what's become of him now?" inquired Frank.

"He found some bishop to japan him, so I heard, about a month ago; though, for the matter of that, he was black enough already. So now he's gone for a parson into some wild, outlandish parish in Devonshire, where, no doubt, he'll hammer his doctrine into their heads, if he can't into their hearts, and teach them to bait foxes and such like varmint, if he can't teach them anything else."

"The good-natured bishop who ordained

him," said Somers, who seemed well up in the scandal, "did so, I was told, on his own responsibility, and without the usual testimonials, which the college authorities point-blank refused to give him. He took lodgings for three months somewhere near the cathedral, attended regularly the daily services, and so bamboozled the old bishop by his clerical attire and sanctimonious demeanour that, on being introduced to his lordship, the unsuspecting prelate absolutely suggested the ministry as a suitable calling for one so seriously disposed as Penmark appeared to him to be. So the ruse succeeded; and having obtained a title and satisfied the examining chaplain, in one month from that date he was duly ordained."

"But why in the world did a man of such habits seek to enter into holy orders?" demanded Frank, utterly puzzled to account for his choice.

"Undoubtedly for the loaves and fishes, if he happen to have a Living in prospect; but if not, for the same reason that prompts scores of others to enter the ministry—because they have been influenced by their parents, who,

under the impression that a son giving early token of being a *vaurien* is more likely to be kept steady by the clerical profession than by any other, force him into it, too often against his will. It is a common habit in some parts of Wales, when a young man is found to be deficient in intellect, or an idle, good-for-nothing fellow, to recommend his parents to make a parson of him ; and the Arabs, I have read, if they do not exactly imitate the sin of Jeroboam by making priests of the lowest of the people, at least do something very like it. They select men of the weakest intellect for their marabouts, believing them to be special objects of Divine care, and therefore all the better qualified for their sacred office."

At this moment a single hard rap on the oak, or outer door of the rooms, brought Somers' conversation to a sudden check ; and before he could resume the subject, a tall, sallow-faced man, wearing a pair of light-coloured drab breeches and long gaiters, a blue bird's-eye throat-lash, and a green cut-away coat, plentifully studded with brass basket-buttons, and commonly called a duck-

hunter, touched his forelock respectfully and stepped over the threshold.

“Mr. Blossom, sir, of St. Giles’s, the livery-stable keeper as you wished to see,” said Potts, announcing the man’s name and vocation as he advanced, with one or two cringing bows, further into the apartment.

“I am expecting a horse up in a day or two, and Potts tells me you have convenient stables and would take every care of him,” said Frank, as he scanned the countenance of the most wily rogue he had ever set eyes on in his life.

“Yes, sir, the best stables in Auksvut. There’s stalls for the ’acks and loose boxes for the ’unters, and there’s just one box now empty, warm as a kitchen corner; would suit your nag exactly, if so be he’s a ’unter and you’d like to stand him with me.”

“I certainly mean to hunt him, and should like a loose box,” replied Frank; “but I should be glad to know what your weekly charges would be for such accommodation.”

“A guinea a week, sir, without hextras; and that is bran-mashes, gruel, use of band-ages, and tips to strappèr.”

“And what corn do you give on those terms?” inquired Frank, eager to have a clear understanding as to the provender allowed before he came to a settlement on the subject.

“The ’oss’s own belly, sir, is the only measure we go by in our stables; we don’t stint the poor dumb hanimals, like some as Potts knows of not far from this college; not we, sir.”

The scout, thus referred to, lost no time in corroborating this statement of Mr. Blossom’s; but, as he did so, the significant glance that passed between them did not escape Frank’s observation.

“Not you, Mr. Blossom; not likely,” Potts said, energetically. “You would as lief dock a man of his beer as a horse of his corn; and that every one in Auksvut knows so well as I do.”

Frank’s experience of life—especially of Oxford life and its manifold meshes for entrapping the young and unsophisticated freshmen—was, of course, very limited in extent; still he was sharp enough to see the two rogues were playing into each other’s

hands, and that motives of self-interest were the prompting cause of Potts's strong and persevering recommendation; so, without coming to a decision on the subject, he determined to consult a Mr. Lloyd Price, one of the junior fellows of St. Columb's, to whom he had brought letters of introduction from his old friend Llewellyn Powell; and as Price continued to reside with no view of taking a part in the work of tuition or the government of the college, but simply to get as much hunting as two good horses would permit him to enjoy, he was clearly the man of all others to give advice on such a point. Accordingly, very much to the chagrin and not a little to the surprise of the two old trappers, who had made cock-sure of netting their young prey there and then, Frank dismissed the stable-keeper with short ceremony, telling him if he'd call again on the morrow he'd then give him a definite answer.

"That man Blossom, Mr. Raleigh, is notoriously the greatest scoundrel in Oxford; and I give you great credit for the praiseworthy caution you have exercised with respect to him," said the junior fellow, who,

having received Frank with marked cordiality, had planted him in a luxurious arm-chair which, with many more equally comfortable, but of a different design, and a sofa *en suite*, was covered with a maroon-coloured Utrecht velvet of the richest description. "The stables, indeed, are well enough; but if you stand your horse there, so bad is the grooming or the provender, probably both, that I'll undertake to say you would not know him to be the same animal in a month's time. No, you must go to Watkins'; he'll do him justice and turn him out like one of his own lot, bright as the morning star. You mean to hunt him, I conclude?"

"Oh, yes, I hope so," replied Frank, modestly; "I brought him up for that purpose."

"Then I trust he's a well-bred one," said Mr. Price, who seemed to think the Devonshire hunters were chiefly packhorses, as being best suited to the high banks and hilly character of the country; "for they are now getting to breed hounds so gaudy—to use the expression of a well-known Cornishman—sacrificing, I fear, nose to pace, that unless

a horse has a fair turn of speed and a drop of good blood in his veins, he has no chance of living with them on a fast day."

"He's a home-grown one, sir, about three parts bred, and perhaps a trifle nearer the wind even than that; but he can travel like a fox, and with my weight on his back—just ten stone four—they must be fast hounds indeed if they can get away from The Beacon with a fair start."

"Bravo!" ejaculated Mr. Price, already much taken by Frank's hunting proclivities, which cropped out in every word he uttered; "bravo! that's just what you'll require. But I hope he is also a well-seasoned animal; for in that case, with the help of a hack, you may get your three days a fortnight out of him without overdoing him."

"He's coming five, that's all, sir; but he's as tough as bell wire, and hasn't had a handful of green-meat inside him for more than a year," replied Frank, encouraged by the open, cordial manner of the junior fellow, towards whom he felt himself equally attracted by the same strong, ruling spirit that governed both of them—the love of hunting.

“I don’t know what lectures you may have, nor how many days a week you will be able to hunt, for, of course, while *in statu pupillari* you cannot altogether ignore the former; but this I do know, that if you are lucky enough to get two days a week with Sir Thomas Mostyn in the Bicester-Windmill country, or with the Duke of Beaufort’s badger-pies at some of their best meets, no one horse, let him be stout as Diomedes and swift as Camilla, could stand the work; so you’ll want another hunter, I suspect, or you’ll very soon knock the young one to pieces, that’s certain. This country,” continued Mr. Price, “has none of the fine elastic turf you can boast of on the slopes of Dartmoor.”

“But we have awful bogs there, which none but the fox and the hounds dare venture to cross,” said Frank, interrupting him.

“True; but they are usually well known, and can often be avoided without losing your hounds. Here, however, when a fox crosses the Marsh-Gibbon or the Otmoor country, making his point, perhaps, for Shotover Wood, go you must, or lose the run al-

together; and as that ground is like one vast glue-pot, your horse will be fortunate indeed if he returns to his stable with only a bad over-reach and minus at least only a couple of shoes."

The junior fellow, having so far instructed Frank, then invited him to breakfast on the following morning, telling him as he did so that he had known him for more than a year through his friend Llewellyn Powell's letters, and that the fame of the Watercombe hounds had often reached him through the same channel. "But," added he, "however good they may be, I shall be surprised if the pace and style in which the hounds of this country kill a fox do not astonish you, and, it may be, cultivate your taste in that line."

On retiring from this interview, Frank repaired at once to his friend Harry Somers's rooms, which, however, he had some difficulty in finding, as they were situated in a dark out-of-the-way quarter of the college, designated "the back slums"—a quarter not included in the architectural design of either quadrangle, and only inhabited by students of small means, or by men of the most noisy,

disorderly character, who could here carry on their nocturnal orgies without the slightest fear of being overheard by the college authorities. Still, Harry's rooms, when Frank at last found them, as described by the porter, "No. 2, New Buildings, three pair of stairs, second door to the right," though small, were in perfect order, and being well furnished with books, looked as comfortable as the most fastidious freshman could wish them to be.

"Well, Frank," inquired his friend, "and what do you think of our junior fellow?"

"A brick to the backbone; that's what I think of him, Harry; and so far from being a stiff-necked don, which I rather expected he might be, I found him exactly the reverse. He warned me to avoid Blossom's stables, and took so kindly an interest in my hunting prospects that, fearing I should knock my young horse to pieces by overwork, he suggested I should get another—a bit of advice I shall of course follow without delay."

"But how will your father like that?" inquired Somers, with no little astonishment.

"Oh! he won't object to it, Harry, provided I don't overdraw my allowance;

especially, too, when he knows I have college authority for the act. Besides, it is a favourite maxim with my father that money spent in hunting is rarely wasted, and that he who uses it spends it like a man."

In less than a week from that time Frank had anticipated his allowance by far more than one-half its yearly amount; the upholsterer having taken full advantage of the *carte blanche* given him with respect to the furniture and decorations of the rooms, which were restored, as if by the wand of a magician, to a state of luxury and elegance worthy of a prince's palace; Maggs, too, the dealer, had charged him one hundred guineas for a horse called The Ferryman—a fiery, herring-gutted thoroughbred, reputed to be the winner of many memorable drags; in fact, the best timber and water jumper in the whole University.

In this latter transaction alone, however, was it a case of ready money, the dealer declaring he had two other customers burning to possess the horse, and that he could sell him "on tick" for a hundred and twenty to either of them: but, as they were both

“lumping pen’norths,” and a stone or two above the average hunting weight, his humanity prompted him to take Frank’s hundred down, rather than see a good horse so shamefully overweighted.

So the money being paid down “on the nail,” and that, too, by a cheque expressly sent by the Squire to pay for the new furniture required for his son’s rooms, The Ferryman was forthwith transferred to Watkins’s stables, whither he was quickly followed by Frank, in order to secure a commodious box contiguous to that of the colt’s. As he entered the covered ride, however, he was not a little surprised, and indeed annoyed, to see a conclave of stable-boys standing round the horse, all in a state of broad grin, and evidently cracking jokes at the expense of that animal or its purchaser.

“Must be fresh, Bill, or he never could a tookt to this un,” said a short bandy-legged man, who, as Frank advanced over the littered ride, had not perceived his near approach.

“Freshman or old stager, he’s safe to be a greenhorn,” replied the individual appealed

to. "He never could a know'd the name of that hoss, neither."

"Yes, he knows it perfectly well; he's called 'The Ferryman,'" said Frank, fitting the cap on to his own head; "but what do you know against him?"

"That ain't his 'varsity name, anyhow," replied the last speaker, in nowise disturbed by the unexpected appearance of the owner and his pointed question. "We calls him 'The Continental Hoss!' 'cause, you see, sir, England ain't big enough for him; he comes to the cliffs too soon, he do; he's a go-ahead one as ever I see, he is, and no mistake; and the first time you throws your leg over him with hounds, you'd better take up a Squire Bedel or two behind you, or I'm jiggered if he don't carry you to Dover."

"Wants twenty stone outside him and the iron-duke atwixt his teeth to stop him, don't he, Bill?"

"Iss, that he do; and then that great Warwickshire squire as 'ad him couldn't hold him no more than a babby."

While he deliberately said this, Bill, who was supposed to know the character of every

horse in the university, and was looked upon as an oracle by his stable companions, appeared to be taking stock of Frank's weight with his half-closed but penetrating eye. Having satisfied himself on that point, he proceeded to recommend him to lose no time in insuring his life for the benefit of his family, if he was rash enough, after all he had heard, to ride that horse with hounds.

At that moment Sam Watkins, the proprietor of the stables, entered the ride, mounted on a long, low, thoroughbred hack, the like of which, for symmetry and action, Frank had never before seen. Had a real, live, Bengal tiger appeared suddenly at their elbows, it could scarcely have startled the stable-men into more instantaneous flight than did the presence of Watkins, as he advanced leisurely up the covered way, the man in charge of The Ferryman alone standing firm at his post, bridle in hand, feeling secure that he at least, while doing his duty, had nothing to fear from his master's arrival.

"Your new purchase, sir, I believe?" said Watkins, touching his hat respectfully, as he drew near to Frank.

“Yes, I’ve just bought him; but if the character your boys give the horse be a true one, I had better have thrown my money into the Cherwell than spent it on so great a brute.”

“Don’t harken to ’em, sir. There’s never a horse comes into this yard they don’t crab. He pulls a few, sir, in rough hands, ’tis true, and the boys don’t like that when they’re a taking him on over night, ’cause, you see, he gets so hot, and they’ve got the dressing of him after.”

“Oh, if that’s all, I don’t mind a button,” said Frank, intensely relieved by Watkins’s counter-statement.

“He can jump a haystack, sir, and cover twenty feet of water like a bird flying,” continued the stable-keeper, observing the returning favour with which his new customer regarded the purchase; “and as for dirt, there’s never a hoss in Awksvut, with only ten stone on his back, can go such a cracker through it as he can. Only give him his head and don’t pull it about, and he’ll travel as steady as a kitchen clock after a few days’ trial. ’Tis those cussed drags as

av ruined half the hosses in Awksvut; they get knocked to pieces by the hawful pace they puts them at their fences, and they comes home with thorns enough in their legs to build a crow's nest with."

Before Watkins had concluded his diatribe against the drag, which he characterized as a barbarous practice, and no sport at all, Frank became perfectly satisfied that The Ferryman had been subjected to gross maltreatment by his former riders; and having made up his mind to give the horse a fair trial with hounds, he saw him quietly turned into a comfortable box, and then left the stables.

Now, the truth as to the horse's real character lay just midway between the conflicting statements of the master and his men. In sending on the night before, the latter, for their own diversion and for sundry pots of beer dependent on the race, were in the habit of indulging in a grind across country, and more than once on such occasions The Ferryman had bolted and almost killed his rider; so they naturally looked upon him as a dangerous brute and of so uncertain a temper

that they would gladly have seen him an inmate of any other stables than their own. It was Watkins's interest, however, to take the animal in for several reasons, but more especially, as it afterwards cropped up, because he and Maggs were confederate horse-dealers; the latter, a consummate judge of horseflesh, frequenting the country fairs far and near, and supplying his partner first, and then the Oxford stable-men with average twelve-stone hunters and weedy thoroughbred hacks, to which beneficent Nature appeared to have given wire and whalebone instead of ordinary bone and sinew, or they never could have sustained the long, the fast, the merciless labour they were so often called on to endure.

The Ferryman was, in fact, a steeplechaser of the modern type, and, barring the awkward fault of bolting when his head was interfered with, was as good a horse across country as ever looked through a bridle; but he was a handful in any man's hands, and, with an unskilled rider on his back, might fairly have been pronounced "a dangerous brute."

Frank, however, had been accustomed to queer ones from his earliest youth, and, being

gifted with a light hand and lots of nerve, he looked forward with delight to a good fox and a fast thing, hoping to win his first laurels in the Bicester country by the speed and prowess of that horse.

The result need not be anticipated.

CHAPTER III.

“Away! away! they’ve been running to kill,
With never a check from the find;
Away! away! we are close to them still,
And the field are furlongs behind!”

G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE.

A KEEN, pitiless north-easter, but happily two degrees above the freezing-point, had been blowing steadily for some days over the flooded vale of the Cherwell; and, although under its drying influence the waters had subsided considerably, and were again fast retreating within their natural bounds, the country on every side lying between Gossford Bridge and Bicester remained still in a state of swamp, exhibiting on the lower land many a shallow lake of diminutive and grotesque appearance, and on the higher ground a surface of clay, strong and holding as pitch itself. The country, however, was now fairly

hunnable; and scent proving breast high during the prevalence of this steady weather, a fox, found at Bletchington, and crossing the vale in the direction of Gravenall, needed all his legs to bring him safely even to that cover, where, with a turn of luck in his favour, he might rake up a less fortunate brother to take his place and bear the brunt of the sylvan war.

At that time the Mostyn Hounds were probably as fast as any in England, and stout, indeed, they need have been to kill the wild foxes bred in that heavy and strongly fenced clay district, extending from Marsh Gibbon, in Oxfordshire, to the Clayton Woods, near Buckingham. Great, too, was the fame of their huntsman, Tom Wingfield, who, as a judge of hounds' work, was considered quite equal to his noted predecessor, Stephen Goodall; while the latter, as a horseman, from his unwieldy weight, could never have held a candle to Tom, than whom a more thrusting, determined rider never crossed a country.

Frank had now been a month at Oxford, and yet, much as he had heard of this pack

and their doings, it so happened that circumstances over which he had no control had hitherto frustrated every plan he had made for seeing them. Twice a week, however, had he contrived to air his new purchase with the Old Berkshire and a pack of fast harriers kept by a wealthy brewer in the immediate neighbourhood ; and although, when pressed by other horses, The Ferryman took the bit between his teeth and almost pulled Frank's arms off, he scarcely ever made a blunder at his fences, taking double post and rails in his stride, and topping the quicksets as if he meant flying into the next parish. On one remarkable occasion, when the hounds met at Lew Heath, and ran their fox as if they were glued to him, from that cover to Long Handborough, Frank and his friend Lloyd Price, afterwards surnamed "the Black Captain," from the colour of the coat he so often carried to the front, were the only two out of a large field that really enjoyed the cream of that run from first to last.

So far, therefore, Frank had reason to be well satisfied with the result of his bargain.

"Sir Thomas meets at Chesterton to-mor-

row, Potts ; so get breakfast ready directly after chapel, and lay for ten," said Frank, addressing his scout, who at that moment had entered his rooms.

"Yes, sir ; beef-steak and oysters, ham and eggs, devilled kidneys and anchovy toast, from Cox's, as usual, I suppose, sir ?"

"With coffee, of course, to any amount ; and, Potts, don't forget to order two tankards of swig and one of proof from the buttery. When there's a good fox a-foot, it's wonderful, Potts, what a charge or two of jumping powder will do for a fellow who can't go a yard without it ; makes a man of him at once ; shoves him along and keeps his horse's head straight at everything."

"So I've heard, sir ; but Mr. Price, the fellow, says *you* don't want no such priming," replied the wily scout, who, for a master so given to hospitality, had a word of flattery always ready at the tip of his tongue. He then vanished to execute the orders Frank had given him.

The next morning, cold and cheerless as it broke over the dark walls of St. Columb's, a goodly muster of undergraduates might have

been seen emerging from all quarters of the college in answer to the noisy, jingling summons of the chapel bell; some, indeed, by their haggard looks and blood-shot eyes, gave plain token of prolonged wassail and short rest, as they hurried across the quadrangles, dragging on their gowns or their surplices in the utmost confusion; while a few, and a few only, of a very different stamp—the steady men of the college—appeared to be going to their devotional duties with as much earnestness and solemnity as if, on a Sabbath morn, they were wending their way to their own parish church.

Had the keen eye of the officiating dean been able to penetrate the white flowing vestments of many of his congregation on that raw morning, he would have discovered beforehand, but probably not with surprise, that they at least were not likely to attend a single college lecture for that day; in fact, that, being habited in pink, and booted and spurred for the chase, they were prepared to cultivate the “noble science,” under the cheery tutelage of Tom Wingfield, in preference to the science of Aristotle or any

other philosopher, under the snarly guidance of a college don.

But the very fact of their being in attendance at early chapel, indicating, as it did, a desire on their part to conform to the discipline of the college, would be alone sufficient to disarm the dean, and dispose him to regard the "cutting of lectures" as a very mild and amenable offence. Indeed, regularity in that respect alone has pulled men through many an ugly scrape—men whose habits in every other way had been most irregular, and who would probably have been rusticated, or even expelled, but for this salutary attention to morning chapel. It would scarcely be fair to say that devotion was not, as it should have been, the first object of the authorities in attaching so much importance to this rule; but, certainly, the moral object of getting men to quit their nocturnal orgies and betake themselves early to bed was a feature strongly intended by that requirement; though, in the heavy drinking bouts of those nights, it may fairly be doubted if it ever shortened a symposium, even for the brief period of a single minute.

Long before the rest of the party entertained by Frank had finished their breakfast rose Lloyd Price to depart, it being his usual practice to ride his hunter gently on, instead of hacking it to cover. Among nine others, all sporting pink, he alone had appeared in a black coat, the sombre hue of which, however, was amply compensated for by the well-cleaned boots and faultless leathers that adorned his lower limbs.

"It's a short ten miles to the meet," he said, buttoning up his square-cut, double-milled hunting-coat over his well-developed chest; "so I'll jog forward, and you'll overtake me, I dare say, long before I reach Chesterton."

"Very likely," replied Frank, "provided you stick to the road; but across country, with a flying fox and a start of only half a minute in your favour, you'd be bad to catch, sir, by the best man alive."

The hall clock had already struck ten, and Price had been gone nearly an hour, before the hacks were all mounted at the back gates of the college walls. A leggy, weedy lot they looked at the best of times; but now,

barely clad with a loose rug, and led slowly to and fro by their several grooms, the cutting north-easter, driving directly down the lane, had made every hair on their thin skins stand on end, stiff as those of a blacking-brush. So gingerly, too, was their action that they seemed to tread the hard street-stones as tenderly as if they were stepping on eggs. But, though now so apparently decrepit, once set a-going over the softer high roads, and their blood fairly warmed, they became rapidly metamorphosed into flying phantoms; and the spectator, viewing them half-way to cover on the Gozzard Flat, would be scared to see them traveling *ventre-à-terre* and tearing madly at their bits; and he would be a good judge indeed to know them again as the same animals.

About an acre of six-year-old gorse constitutes, or rather then constituted, the chief cover to be drawn at Chesterton House; but it is thick, strong, and prickly as a cactus hedge, and requires a high-couraged hound to face it, without the vestige of a drag to entice him in. Nevertheless, at the first

wave of Tom Wingfield's hand, ten couple or more disappear at once within its spiny bounds, forcing their way, as if against a *chevaux-de-frise*, at every advancing step. But ere a hound speaks (for the wily animal must be at home in that warm, close retreat) a glance at Frank and his friends and the well-mounted field will be necessary, before the dreams of that slumbering marauder are disturbed even by a single note.

The popular Master, being laid up with gout, did not appear; but a relation of his, one of the sacerdotal order, fulfilled effectively, if not so courteously, the usual duties required in that capacity. Around him, as the noble pack were being paraded to and fro in a sheltered spot, were gathered a small but select knot of devoted houndsmen—Drakes, Peytons, and Lloyds—men of whom, as daring and accomplished riders, Tom Wingfield was wont to say that “no fences were strong enough, and no hounds fast enough, to shake them off: they'd be with them, go where they would.”

While in the act of putting his foot into the stirrup-iron and throwing his leg over

The Ferryman's back, Frank was struck with a peculiar look about the horse's near-eye, which he had never before observed. It seemed to him to be wider open than usual, as a distinct rim or edging of white gleamed forth ominously from under the upper eyelid, giving to the coloured iris, and indeed to the whole countenance of the nervous beast, a look of disturbed and malignant temper, too probably provoked by some recent row.

"What on earth has happened to the horse?" exclaimed Frank, confronting the groom, who, being on the off-side, and carefully keeping the head of the animal between them, had thus far screened himself from Frank's observation; "and you've had an ugly fall, I see," continued he, aghast at beholding a frightful gash and contusion on the man's face, extending from his left eye to the lower jaw-bone.

"Bolted with me, the beggar did; and here I be, as Ned Smith says, blemished for life; I wish some un had a cut his throat afore he com'd into our stables, I do."

"I'm very sorry for it," said Frank, sympathetically; "but you know I have ridden

him frequently, and the horse has never played any tricks with me." He then gave the man a sovereign, telling him to go at once to Paxton, the eminent surgeon of that day, and get a plaister put upon his cheek, adding, if there was anything more to pay, he would be answerable for it.

The groom, with a look of unfeigned astonishment, grasped the golden coin with avidity, being fully conscious that if Frank had only known the circumstances that led to the accident, so far from receiving one shilling in compensation for it, he might fairly expect immediate dismissal from his master's service. He then mounted the hack, touched his hat, and rode away directly for Oxford.

His back had scarcely been turned, however, before Lloyd Price, who had taken advantage of a by-lane diverging from the high road to Bicester, and which was supposed to shorten the distance to the meet by several hundred yards, made his appearance, and coming up instantly to Frank, he inquired, with considerable excitement, for the groom who had been sent on with his horse to cover.

"Because," he said, "I saw the villain and three others taking a grind across country as if they were riding a race; I'll swear to The Ferryman, for he was ahead of the rest, and I knew him by the style of his fencing and the pace at which he went. If Watkins don't sack that fellow, I'll never recommend him again."

"Then that accounts for it all," said Frank; "the change in the horse's eye and the awful gash on the man's face. They must have come a tremendous cropper together, and the horse won't forget it, I expect, for many a long day."

"Nor the man either," said the junior fellow, somewhat appeased, on hearing that speedy retribution had already overtaken the culprit; "but that's the way that noble horse has been ruined, I'll undertake to say."

"Can't be a doubt of it, sir; the fellow told me the horse had bolted with him, and left me to infer it was on the high road; so, instead of a kick, I gave the rascal a sovereign."

"Coals of fire on the villain's head!" exclaimed Price; "but if he's well marked,

that'll teach him a lesson, I hope, never to take such liberties again."

Subsequently Frank discovered that a steeplechase across the flat lying between Islip and the Bicester road had been planned by the grooms, The Ferryman to give his competitors a start of one hundred yards, for a gallon of beer. Seeing the others so far ahead of him, that spirit of rivalry which is given to most horses burst forth with fury in him; and the groom very quickly losing all control over his mouth, which he sawed at in vain, the game beast, in attempting to take a double in his stride out of some rotten ground, came down with a mighty crash into the next field, and in struggling to recover himself kicked the rider in the face, and left a mark on it for life.

Those were the simple facts of the case; but the man's story to his master gave a very different complexion to the whole affair.

"You see, sir," he said, "there's a short cut across the fields over against Bletchington, and, thinking to save the horses' legs, we took that line. The beggar then bolted, and afore I could stop him down he come and me

under him; then he turned-to to mill, and it's a mussy there's a whole bone left in my body."

Lloyd Price, however, told Watkins what he had seen—a veritable steeplechase between the grooms, and that led to the immediate discharge of all four engaged in it—a summary punishment, that failed not to check this cruel practice for many a day, not only in Watkins's stable, but throughout the University.

"Have at him, Lucifer, my lad!" shouts Wingfield, who, standing on the down-wind side of the covert, catches a glimpse of the hound, feathering freely and all but speaking, as he struggles on to the centre of the close-matted brake. That cheer has its instant effect on the rest of the pack, every hound of which dashes in, as if eager to share the glory of the find, now imminent.

"Stand a little back, if you please, gentlemen," says Wingfield again, addressing some of Frank's breakfast party, who are edging forward towards the end of the gorse, "or they're safe to chop him, 'tis so thick."

Not quite so polite was the parson in

command, whose round, weather-beaten face became lurid with rage, like the sun setting before a coming storm. "If you haven't learned where to stand, gentlemen," he said, gruffly, "you should go home and be taught."

But he might have saved his breath; for at that instant the fox, breaking cover almost between his own horse's legs, a triumphant chuckle is hurled back by one of the lectured party, adding fuel to the fire of the choleric man.

Escaping for dear life, the fox glances into the first fence, like a comet into a cloud, while a short and sharp scream from his reverence rings in his ears; and at that signal out spring the hounds from all quarters of the gorse, and, catching the scent, dash after him like a hailstorm pelting in his rear.

"Hold hard, you fellows!" yells the old parson at the top of his voice, as he observes the same wild lot charging the fence simultaneously with the leading hounds. "Give them room, do, you pack of fools!"

A few strong fences, however, before they cross the Bicester road quickly bring the

mischief-makers to grief, and the hounds, no longer pressed, settle to the scent at a swinging pace. But now a strange sight presents itself to Frank's eyes. A sea of water, through which the hounds are dashing knee-deep, stretches far and wide over the plain; and as the scent is fairly breast high they are literally enveloped in a cloud of spray, insomuch that to distinguish one hound from another is now an utter impossibility. Still, led by this cloud, the field follow on, cheered, if they do not see them, by the deep, sonorous chop of the dog-hounds—the tambourine music of this noble band; and though many are the sousings to which both the wary and the unwary are condemned, no real damage is done; they kick up a great commotion, but fall lightly on their watery bed.

The fox, hitherto pointing for Gravenall Wood, which, owing to the sea in front of him, he probably despairs of reaching, now turns for Islip, and getting upon higher ground leads the pack almost down wind, and as yet without a check, over the rough and heavy pastures lying to the north of that village.

By this time, out of the hundred men that appeared at the cover-side, not ten are to be seen within a mile of the hounds; but of those ten Frank, who has taken Tom Wingfield for his pilot, and stuck to him like glue, is well up; The Ferryman, too, notwithstanding his morning adventure, is apparently as full of "go" as when he first left his stable. Close up also, though wide of the pack, is the junior fellow, Lloyd Price; but his horse, so carefully and well ridden, is showing unmistakable symptoms of distress, and his rider is evidently edging away for the Bicester and Oxford road before he is reduced to a dead standstill in face of the field.

"More water, gentlemen, and a drop too much this time," exclaims that noble horseman, Sir Henry Peyton, seeing the hounds now carrying a desperate lead, and pointing direct for the Cherwell.

"Go along, then," shouts his son, of whom, as a bold rider, it might almost be said—

"Tydeides melior patre:"

"sink or swim, if the hounds cross it, I'll

cross it too." Nor was it an empty boast; for the Styx itself, if above ground, would not have stopped him in those days.

"Better go for Gozzard Bridge, sir," says Wingfield; "if the fox will have it, there's no other way of getting over."

The river, now within three fields of them, and the hounds going straight for it, is a bumper to the brim; its width at least forty feet, and the foul colour of the stream more like pea-soup than any other mixture. Wingfield, at that moment, would gladly give a month's wages to any labourer who might do him the opportune service of heading the fox ere he reaches its bank, or he would even bless the sheep-dog that would now turn him from his course; but neither the one nor the other are in sight, and the hounds still hold on, running with determined and terrible purpose straight for the stream.

One fence more, and then comes the deluge; but that fence is a strong quick, with a wide ditch on the off-side; and Frank and Mr. Webb, who are in front of the field, are putting their two horses at it almost at a racing pace. An overreach, however, or

some such mishap, brings the latter to the ground with a heavy thud, while The Ferryman, with a mighty stride, skims over it like a bird on wing.

But The Ferryman's blood is now up, and as the leading hounds are now dashing into the Cherwell not fifty yards ahead of him, Frank suddenly finds that the horse is pricking his ears in view of the water, and he has no more control over him than if he were riding an alligator. Nevertheless, with all the leverage that his knees and muscles can command, he clutches the curb-rein and takes a last mighty pull at his mouth ; but the horse has his bit fast between his teeth, and only shakes his head as if in ridicule of the attempt. The feat, then, of John Roberts suddenly flashes across his mind—a noted Devonshire huntsman, who, when his horse was running away with him, and closely approaching the cliffs at Scobscombe, rose high in his stirrups, and dealing him a tremendous blow between the ears with his iron-headed whip, felled him to the earth, and so saved his own life—but, lacking the cool resolve and instant action of that

veteran, Frank sits hard in his saddle, measures the water with his eye, and awaits the ducking he sees is inevitable.

And now, from the very edge of the bank, with a desperate spring worthy of a better fate, the game beast seems to fly; but wanting wings, falls far short of the opposite side and disappears, rider and all, midway in the turbid tide.

“*Volvitur in caput!*” exclaims the junior, who witnesses the scene from a bit of rising ground in the distance; “down, down he goes like Palinurus, and if he can’t swim it’s a hundred to one the poor fellow is drowned.”

But Frank has no fears for himself on that score, the coracle having long ago made him almost as much at home in the water as out of it; and although he clings hard to The Ferryman’s ribs, he does so with the faint hope that, when the horse rises, they may yet land together, and get on with the hounds on the right side. But on rising, as they soon do, to the surface, he finds to his horror that the horse is in difficulties, and that one of his hind legs is apparently paralyzed; so,

quitting him in an instant, he strikes out and swims vigorously for the opposite bank.

An awkward scramble through a willow tree, which, however, only drags off his hat, brings him safely to land, when his first impulse was to turn round and look after The Ferryman, hoping to give the poor beast some help in this his moment of need. Alas! his own hat is the sole object now floating on the water; not a vestige of the horse is visible; nor is there the slightest commotion, not even a ripple, to indicate his whereabouts beneath the dark, rolling tide.

Utterly bewildered as to what has happened, he is preparing to rush down stream, thinking the strong current may have carried the animal beyond the next bend in the river, when Mr. Webb and a few others, who have now reached the left bank, explain the mystery: "The horse has caught his off hind foot in the stirrup-iron; I'll swear to it!" shouted the former. "I saw it distinctly as he struggled to the surface, and then went down like a lump of lead."

But, true as the statement was, there were other impediments by which the unfortunate

beast was fatally hampered; for, more than a month afterwards, when the floods had subsided, and his carcase was found fast hooked by the snaggy roots of an old willow, it was discovered, not only that his hind-hoof had been caught in the stirrup-iron, but that his two fore legs had become so entangled in the reins, that, in attempting to swim, they must have dragged his head under water at every stroke. So jammed too was his whole frame by the force of the current, and probably by his own struggles, into the powerful network of the long, twisted roots that, if he had been caught by the arms of an octopus, he could scarcely have been held by a tighter grasp. About fifty yards below the spot at which Frank landed, the downstream course of the horse had been arrested by these roots; but before the saddle and bridle could be recovered it was found necessary to fasten a hand-saw to the end of a long pole, and, with that tool, a couple of men were able, after a hard day's work, to release the carcase, and, sodden as they were, to save the accoutrements. Blackwall and Evans, however, would never have recog-

nised them again as the same highly finished articles for which they had measured The Ferryman, and which they had turned out from their well-known laboratory in the High-street, spic and span new, not a month before.

But where are the hounds? Three couple only are across the Cherwell, and they chiefly puppies, or one-year-old hounds, the flingers of the chase. But as they fail to hit him off on that side, Wingfield holds the body of the pack down stream for some distance, when, headed by a long-faced hound called Nestor, they soon pick up the line, and again are in full swing down the meadows, pointing for Woodeaton, and running for blood.

“Yonder he goes, by Jove!” exclaimed the gallant young Peyton, as he views the fox, now a miserable, dark-looking object, rolling in his gait, and just crawling ahead towards a large willow pollard close before the hounds. “They’ll have him now in a second or two; he’s dead beat, and can’t go another yard.”

But he has counted without his host; the fox crawls into a narrow aperture in the bole

of the tree, as the leading hounds are snapping at his brush, and happily saves his life for another day.

Mr. Webb proposes cutting the tree down, and giving the hounds their desert, there and then; but Tom Wingfield, much as he would have liked it, was forced to admit he dared not attempt that job. "For," said he, "I mind old Stephen running a fox into this very tree, and then the tenant warned him not to touch it, telling him the Dean of Westminster loved that grand old willow, and wouldn't see it injured, no, not for its weight in gold. And I'll warrant ee," added Tom, with a sigh, "that this is the same fox."

"Then spare him, Tom, by all means," exclaimed Sir Harry Peyton, taking off his hat as if in honour of the gallant brute; "if he has beaten these hounds twice, may he long live, I say, to beget his like, and beat them again on many a future day."

CHAPTER IV.

“ *Shylock*. Well, then, it now appears you need my help :
Go to, then ; you come to me, and you say
. . . We would have monies. . . . Monies is your suit.”

“ Here’s to the arm that can hold ’em when gone,
Still to a gallop inclin’d, sir ;
Heads in the front with no bearing-reins on !
Tails with no cruppers behind, sir ! ”

EGERTON WARBURTON.

No feat, not even if he had tripped up the senior Proctor, or knocked down Luke Rogers in a town-and-gown row, could have reflected more glory on Frank’s head than that act of his in charging the Cherwell. To make his acquaintance, then, became at once a rage among the undergraduates ; for, deny it as he would, a general belief prevailed that he had wilfully ridden at the river in its then swollen state, determined, if he failed to cross it, at least to stop the field.

“I tell you, I saw him distinctly cram both spurs into The Ferryman’s ribs, as he put him forty miles an hour at the awful place,” maintained Bob Granite, a gentleman-commoner of St. Ebb’s, himself afterwards as fearless and hard a rider as ever followed the Baron’s Hounds.

“He must be mad as a hatter to think any horse short of Pegasus could cover forty feet of water,” said the Major, a noble specimen of a Shropshire squire; who, from his kind, genial nature, seasoned as it was with a strong spice of humour, was certainly one of the most popular men in the university.

“Not he, no more mad than you are, Major; he’s just a dare-devil fellow, without an atom of funk in him, very fresh and not a little provincial in his dialect; Doric or Devonshire it may be, for aught I know to the contrary; but he’s a gentleman for all that.”

“Then you’ve made his acquaintance, Bob; who the deuce could have introduced you?” inquired the Major, that formality being considered an indispensable necessity in Oxford etiquette: indeed, the gulf that yawned between the junior members of St. Ebb’s and

those of St. Columb's was regarded by the former as a barrier impassable, except by the special mediation of some mutual friend. No school ties, not even those of kith and kin, were held to be sufficient without this necessary passport; so jealously, at that period, was the inner and sacred circle of life at St. Ebb's guarded against the intrusion of an outer and possibly lower caste of men.

"Who could have introduced you, Bob?" said the Major, again; not immediately receiving an answer to that important question, owing to the din of the supper-party going on around him.

"Why, Lloyd Price, of course; the only man I know at St. Columb's; so I give notice that I mean to leave my card on him to-morrow."

"And ask him to dinner, Bob; I should like to know him too. Watkin and 'the Crow' will fall down and worship him, when they hear of that Cherwell feat."

The former undergraduate alluded to had a few days previously met with a bad fall, while tilting at the Quentin Club, on Bullingdon Common, and was then lying *hors-de-*

combat on his couch, utterly disabled by the accident. He had consequently missed the Chesterton run—a misery he never ceased to deplore—although all the incidents of the day (which, like Virgil's Fame, the oftener they were told the bigger they grew) had been narrated to him by every man who had seen, and many who had not seen, that eventful run. The latter, a houndsman from his cradle, and a man of honour to the backbone; but, to the alarm of all who loved him, the intimate associate of a genius who “kept a book,” and whose transcendent abilities oscillated dangerously from the study of the differential and integral calculus to that of the odds at Tattersall's.

Not a week afterwards, Frank was as much at home among the hunting set at St. Ebb's as if he were an enrolled member of that college: but as his associates were, most of them, either in possession of, or heirs to, estates returning a rental of more thousands a year than Watercombe could count in hundreds, he very soon found the allowance received from his father utterly insufficient, even for the pocket-money required for his

current amusements. The outlay needful for hunting would, as he well knew, be regarded by the Squire as a venial extravagance; but that daily drain occasioned by billiards, vingt-un, pigeon-matches at the Weirs or on Cowley Marsh, and tandem excursions to Witney, Woodstock, and Henley-on-Thames, exhausting as it was to the resources of his limited exchequer, would be looked upon in a very different light; for ready money he must have to meet such expenses.

True, he went "tick" for the wine and supper parties he was so fond of giving; for the horses and tandems he hired; for guns, saddlery, and hunting-togs (a Bond-street tailor being especially retained to provide them); and, above all, for the costly pictures with which his rooms were decorated. Consequently, before the end of the first term, not only was his name down for considerable sums in the books of most of the chief tradesmen, but he had borrowed a hundred pounds from a money-lender, giving him a bill for the capital, and undertaking to pay five pounds a month, by way of interest, till that was repaid.

In a small back parlour of the Roebuck Inn

a knot of tradesmen were in the habit of assembling almost nightly, ostensibly on convivial grounds, but in reality to talk over the present and future prospects of their new customers, and to ascertain, so far as they could from each other, the length of the tick-tether to which it would be safe to allow them to go.

“I tell you I knows it,” said Maggs, the horse-dealer, at one of those meetings; “I got it from Potts, his own scout, and he had it from the bursar of St. Columb’s, that he’s an only son, and must come in for the biggest landed estate in all Devonshire, when his father dies. Besides, didn’t he pay me a rattling good sum down on the nail for that horse he killed? So he’s all right in the long run, and no mistake.”

“That’s the best news I’ve heard for many a day,” said the picture-dealer, reviving from the state of gloomy uncertainty into which he had been plunged soon after he had parted with his valuable goods. “I’ll stand bottoms of brandy all round on the strength of that information; and give him unlimited ‘tick’ till he puts on his gown.”

"That he'll never do," replied Maggs; "he's a deal too fast for that; though, if they keep him anywhere, they'll keep him at St. Columb's: but, I say, they'll scratch him there before ever he gets his little-go."

"What's his real age?" inquired the money-lender: "he don't look twenty; but Potts swears he's older than he looks, and that he'll be twenty-one next Christmas."

"Never mind his age, Skinner; a gentleman must be a gentleman," said the horse-dealer, "when he has a fine estate to fall back upon; and if you take his bond for a thousand, I'll give you a hundred down to go shares in it."

This opinion appeared to satisfy the money-lender; who, without waiting for the treat promised by the picture-dealer, soon afterwards rose from his seat and quitted the Roebuck. The next morning, as Frank, who had just swallowed his breakfast in a great hurry, and was putting on his drab Salisbury overcoat, with the intention of "tooling" the Berkeley Hunt coach down to Cheltenham, a single, gentle rap on his inner door (for as yet his oak was rarely sported) apprised him

that some one, probably an importunate tradesman, was there, seeking an order at that early hour.

"Come in," shouted he at the top of his voice, and in a tone indicative of such marked impatience that the cringing fellow who entered made a most humble apology for intruding at so early an hour.

"But sir," said he, "I knew you was a hunting gentleman, and would perhaps be off before I could give you an answer to your application of yesterday; so I thought I'd come betimes to say you can have the money—one hundred pounds, or two, if you wish it—on your own bond; of course, countersigned by one of your college friends."

"Thank you, Skinner; one hundred will be sufficient for the present, and if I want more I shall know where to come for it; but how soon can you let me have the money?"

"One half this instant, sir, if you'll be good enough to put your name to that paper," replied the usurer, producing a document on which the terms of the loan were fully stated, "and the remainder after your friend has endorsed the bill."

“All right,” said Frank, snatching a pen already dipped in ink, and attaching his name, without reading a word of it, to the document in question, while Skinner handed him the money in ten five-pound notes. “The Berkeley Hunt won’t wait a second,” continued Frank; “and if I don’t catch her at Witney, I shall lose my drive altogether.”

“Then you’ll attend to the endorsement another day?” inquired Skinner, folding up the acceptance and depositing it carefully within a vast pocket-book, which appeared to be already cram-full of similar documents. He then glided away, as Satan might have done when Eve took her first bite at that fatal apple.

Frank had no difficulty whatever in finding a friend to back his bill; for, partly owing to Potts’s exaggeration, and partly to the extravagant style of habits he had adopted in order to keep pace with his associates at St. Ebb’s, it was generally believed that the Watercombe estate, to which he was known to be sole heir, was so extensive that, if he had not taken his fling in this fashion, he would have been looked upon as a poor spiritless

fellow, unworthy of his birthright. So, if the bill had represented a thousand, instead of a hundred pounds, it would have been backed with equal confidence by almost any one of his many friends.

When that requirement had been duly fulfilled, Frank, in his utter simplicity, of course expected that the remaining fifty pounds would be handed over to him forthwith. But not so: Skinner, in addition to his money-lending business, sold wine on commission; and when a case of claret, charged at 120s. a dozen, and two more of port and sherry, which were only drinkable when mulled, were stowed away in Frank's bins, and the price thereof deducted from the moiety, the amount of cash he received fell far short of even one-half the expected sum. Nor would it have been any use to remonstrate; for such were the written terms on which Frank had accepted the loan, and it was clearly his own fault if, before signing it, he had not understood the conditions imposed by the contract.

That debt, it is almost needless to add, soon grew into far greater dimensions: the

renewal of the bill; more money borrowed, and the accumulation of interest—not a farthing of which did Frank ever think of paying—swelled it by the end of his first four terms into a serious sum. Eventually, however, it was paid by post-obits and a heavy mortgage on the Watercombe estate; but, in that form, it still hung like a millstone round Frank's neck for many a future year.

The loss of *The Ferryman* was quickly supplied by a fresh purchase; but this time, instead of being required to pay ready money for the animal—a grand old hunter that, in stable language, could jump a parish pinfold—the now accommodating Maggs begged it might “go to book;” and although the price was a high one—at least double the market value, considering that the horse was said to be of sufficiently long-standing in the university to take his doctor's degree—Frank offered no objection to that convenient arrangement.

Indeed, such was the facility, it might even be said the encouragement, he met with on every side to incur debt, that on many occasions the ready five-pound note, proffered over the counter for articles purchased, was

refused on the ground that change was scarce—a specious plea, invariably accompanied by a request that he would permit the trifle to “go to book.”

Nor did Frank’s conduct in this respect differ at all from that of most other freshmen; for, few and far between were they—at least in those days—whose moral courage enabled them to resist such temptation; the bird, indeed, need have been a wary one to escape the many nets so artfully spread for its entanglement.

Before the Michaelmas term had fairly come to a close, Frank, who, unfettered by too many college lectures, had been able, with the help of a hired horse or two, to enjoy his four days a week with the hounds of the neighbourhood—and above all, had tasted the first sweets of an independent life—wrote home to say that as the Christmas Vacation was a short one, he wished, with his father’s approval, to continue in residence during that period. A few men of St. Ebb’s, he said, with whom he had formed an intimate acquaintance, proposed doing the same thing; and as one of the fellows of his

own college—Lloyd Price—had suggested the plan to him, he thought a long to-and-fro journey into Devonshire might be saved by its adoption.

The Squire, having read the letter, proceeded at once to consult Lady Susan on the subject. Now, the news of Frank's attachment to the beauty of Heathercote had by this time become the talk of the county, and had been repeatedly conveyed to her ladyship's unwilling ears; indeed, it was currently rumoured that not only were they privately engaged, but that Frank had been heard to say—and she knew it from her maid—that “he should live and die a bachelor, if he were not permitted to marry Mary Cornish.”

Gall and wormwood to her palate could scarcely have been more bitter than this report to her feelings; for, independently of the bad blood so long existing between the two families, and the very different social circles in which they respectively moved, Lady Susan had set her heart on seeing her son married to a near connection of her own—a sprig of nobility, and the richest heiress in the county of Cornwall.

“By all means, Raleigh, give your consent; boys are so changeable, you know, in their fancies that, if he does not see that girl for six months, he’ll forget her altogether,” said Lady Susan, reading over the letter a second time. “I’d rather follow the boy to his grave than see his prospects and our own blighted for life by such a *mésalliance*. Then he has joined, as I hoped he would, the best set at St. Ebb’s; and that, you know, must be of the greatest advantage to him; for, after the rust he contracted at that low school at Buckbury, to associate with such good company cannot fail to improve him in every respect.”

“I’m not quite so sure of that,” said the Squire, with an anxious expression settling on his face. “They’re a fast lot at St. Ebb’s—men of large means and expensive habits; and to attempt keeping pace with them, as I know from experience, must bring the boy sooner or later to inevitable grief; and, on the other hand, if he don’t live as they live, and do as they do, the bitter bread of mortification will assuredly be his daily lot. But far better this fate, with the approval of a

good conscience, than the other; the evil results of which, repent as he will, can never be repaired, No; I wish, with all my heart, the boy had stuck to his own in-college set, and played first fiddle amongst them, instead of running the risk of being crippled for life, and, into the bargain, of subjecting himself to the odious imputation of being considered a tuft-hunter; to which, however guiltless, he will now be liable."

"Never, Mr. Raleigh! How could he be called a tuft-hunter for choosing to associate with his equals in preference to those of a lower caste? You seem to forget that the boy's grandfather was an earl, whose ancestor won his spurs before the battle of Hastings; and, as to getting into debt, he may get out of that by economy; but he can never get over a miserable *mésalliance*, such as that would be on which he is now bent. So pray let him remain at Oxford till this fit is over. I see no other chance of saving him."

"Be it so, madam; his and your prayer shall be granted; and, much as my prophetic soul is troubled, I devoutly hope the result may be satisfactory; nevertheless, I repeat,

the company of the rich is ever dangerous to a poor man ; though God forbid that the case of the dwarf, who formed an alliance with a giant and went into battle with him, should be exemplified in Frank."

"Better be crippled in good company, Mr. Raleigh, than hampered with a wife from such a family ; the very thought of it is killing me," said Lady Susan, sinking back into an arm-chair and covering her face with both hands, as if suffering intense mental agony. Now, if the Squire possessed one virtue less than another, it was certainly that of patience ; and as this action of her ladyship portended a scene, of which, from long and bitter experience, he had a thorough dread, he rang the bell for her body-guard, as he called the maid, and, carrying the letter with him, escaped to his own room.

There, seated at his desk, he wrote a long and earnest epistle to Frank, warning him against the danger he incurred from association with men of so much larger means than himself, and especially pointing out the ruin that awaited him if he launched into extravagance, borrowed money, and became encum-

bered with debt. But he made no allusion whatever to Mary Cornish; and, knowing full well that opposition on his part would be far more likely to sharpen the edge of the boy's attachment than to blunt it, he determined to let that matter take its chance, but at the same time devoutly hoped the fire might burn out and at length end in smoke. He then gave his consent to Frank's request.

The gownsmen give life to the city of Oxford during term time; but, during the Christmas or protracted period of the Long Vacation, when a visitor might as well expect to see the Pope in pontifical robes as a member of the university in his cap and gown, the deserted colleges and sombre old walls, despite the beauty of their architecture, impress the whole place with a cheerless and desolate aspect. And if, perchance, during the Christmas Vacation a few men reading hard for honours, or a few others of a very different turn—the hunting men—may still be found occupying their rooms, the latter could only be recognised in the streets as University *alumni* by their scarlet coats or shooting costume, and the former by their

thoughtful and pallid looks, rather than by one scrap of the usual academics. Discipline, too, at that period, if not wholly suspended, is only partially enforced, and the undergraduates are wont to treat the beneficent and dignified dame, Alma Mater, with no more respect than if she were an old village schoolmistress.

Frank, consequently, took his fling to its utmost length; feeling, for the first time in his life, as if he were now really his own master; but the delusion was as the mirage of the desert—present pleasure at the expense of future woe.

“I’ve just bought a horse, Raleigh, which Maggs tells me is as good in harness as he is across country,” said Gore Leveson, a gentleman-commoner of St. Ebb’s, in whose rooms Frank and one or two hunting companions were then dining; “so what do you say to a run down to Cheltenham? We’ll borrow Bromley’s new cart, and I’ll clap him in the shafts, if you’ll find a slap-up leader; we could dine and sleep at the Plough, and come comfortably back the next day.”

“But how about sleeping out? the scouts, I

understand, are sworn to report us ; and I don't want to get sent away before the Duke's hounds come to Heythrop."

"No fear of that, Raleigh ; do as I do ; tumble up your bed and tip your scout a sovereign ; and if that don't stop Potts's mouth, never believe me again."

"In that case," said Frank, "I'm your man ; and I don't see why we shouldn't put in The Beacon ; if he'll face the collar, he'll make a tip-top leader."

"So he would," replied Leveson, delighted at the idea of having to handle and teach a young, unbroken horse his first lesson in harness ; "by all means, Raleigh, let's have him."

Among the many amateur whips of the university, few had attained the art of handling the ribbons with so much skill and neatness as Gore Leveson. It had been the chief subject of his study, in fact, from the first hour of his matriculation to the day on which, after a champagne breakfast, he put the crowning touch to his Olympics, by driving a tandem at full gallop round the great quadrangle of St. Ebb's—a foolhardy

feat that led to his immediate expulsion. The old Dean had viewed it from his own window, and discovering from the porter who the culprit was, he summoned him to his presence, and thus laconically addressed him : " Sir, the quadrangle of St. Ebb's is not the Plain of Elis ; nor are the Isthmian games permitted within these walls. You will cease, sir, henceforth to be a member of this college and University." He then erased his name in the usual way ; but the ostracism, if such it might be called, fell lightly enough on Gore Leveson ; its result being simply a change of venue ; for his coaching pictures, and the vast stock of tandem and other whips, which decorated his rooms at St. Ebb's, were forthwith transferred to a set of luxurious apartments in the High-street ; where, no longer subjected to gate regulations nor to academical control, he continued to enjoy his Oxford life with unlimited freedom. Subsequently, for more than three terms, Leveson's rooms became the fashionable lounge for all the hunting, coaching, and fast men of the university ; and from that centre emanated, almost daily, some new project for a driving excursion, a pic-

nic at Nuneham, a steeplechase, or a riding-match against time—from Oxford to London and back, a distance of 110 miles, being the course selected for such a feat.

Consequently the ruin, immediate or future, that befel many a man of that set—ay, and many a parent too—owing to the example of Leveson, and the schemes hatched in those rooms, it is scarcely possible to exaggerate. A commission in the Life Guards, however, at length relieved the university of his attractive presence, and gave to the country a hero scarcely better known for the matchless skill and elegance with which he handled his team than for the soldier-like bearing he displayed in manœuvring his troops.

But we have anticipated our tale. Leveson was still a member of St. Ebb's when the expedition to Cheltenham was arranged at his table ; and although it was vacation-time, and the discipline of the university seemed to be in abeyance, still the act of sleeping out of college, even at that time, would certainly, if discovered, have been followed at least by rustication, if not by more serious consequences. Notwithstanding this risk, however,

in a morning or two afterwards, the tandem-cart, having for its occupants Gore Leveson, Frank, and Lord Adam Lethbridge, the last a merry-hearted Milesian, whose duty it was to wake up the drowsy toll-bar men with a copper horn at least a yard long, drew up at the Hollybush Inn, and there awaited the expected leader.

Quiet as The Beacon was naturally, he had nevertheless rebelled several times at his novel harness, even before he could at length be brought up to the starting-point; and in passing through George Lane, a back-way towards the Seven-bridge Road, he was immediately recognized in one of these tantrums as Frank's horse by the Dean of St. Columb's, then the only authority in residence at that college.

"Keep his head straight, and hold on till I get him into swing," said Gore Leveson to the groom, who was running alongside, doing his utmost to soothe and encourage the nervous beast. "There! let 'em go; it's all right now!"

And so it was. The Beacon, put into an easy canter and treated with a gentle hand,

maintained that pace over the Seven-bridge Road with apparently as much light-heartedness as if he had been going to hounds; he needed not the whip, nor was he once checked or brought to a standstill before they had reached the double toll-bar at Ensham Bridge. And yet this was the first time the horse had ever looked through a collar.

Had he been frequently driven, and pronounced "steady in harness" by some rough breaker, in all probability he would have given more trouble and have done his work far less pleasantly than he did under the finished touch of Leveson's light hand. No animal is more amenable to gentle treatment than a horse; and on the first lessons of his life the viciousness or tractability of his future character will often depend. Some few horses, it is true, inherit vice and are vicious by nature; but even these are sometimes to be won over and fairly tamed by habitual kindness and gentle usage; whereas harshness and rough treatment leave an impression which is never obliterated from the long memory of an ill-used horse.

The road being in fair travelling order, the

distance to Cheltenham was performed in little more than five hours; and, with the exception of a somewhat amusing episode that took place at the Bird-in-Hand Inn, at Burtford, where they stopped to bait, no other incident worthy of record occurred throughout the journey.

A grilled fowl—or, as it is called at Oxford, a spread-eagle—having been ordered for their luncheon, Lord Adam, who had gone into a back bedroom to wash his hands, was not a little surprised to see an old cook and a boy in full pursuit of a hen which, in the stable-yard below, was doing its utmost to elude capture. Inferring at once—and rightly too—that the bird was intended for their use, he rushed down to represent the matter to his companions, protesting that plain bread-and-cheese would be far preferable to the tough meal they were about to be served with, and that the order for the spread-eagle should at once be countermanded.

“Hold hard, Lethbridge!” exclaimed Leveson, who, racketty fellow as he had been at Eton, had nevertheless been so well drilled in Horace by Keats’ persuasive arm, that he had

become to a certain extent impregnated with the taste, if not with the spirit, of the poet, and frequently quoted him, especially in matters relating to wine and cookery. "Hold hard, my boy! I don't see why the fowl should be tough, if we only follow the advice of our old friend Horace, the prince of epicures, however much he satirized the sect. The receipt is a simple one: he tells you that, if surprised by the sudden and unexpected arrival of a guest in the evening, lest you should offend his palate with a tough fowl, you should plunge the bird alive into Falernian must, and that by this process it will be made tender:

"Doctus eris vivam mixto mersare Falerno:
Hoc teneram faciet.'"

"But where's the Falernian to come from?" inquired Lord Adam, with an air of incredulity.

"Oh, that's easily manufactured," replied Leveson; "a bottle of claret and some diluted vinegar will produce a vinous mixture, which, if not equal to the best growth of Italy, would be far better tippie than that vile Sabine wine

which the poet was ashamed to put before his friend Mæcenas. So what hindereth? Let's try it instanter."

So saying, followed by his two companions, he rushed into the yard; and the fowl, having been captured, was at once plunged into the liquor up to its very beak, and sometimes over it, for at least ten minutes. It was then killed, plucked, and forthwith grilled; and the experiment proving eminently successful, Lord Adam was wont, in after years, when encountering a tough beefsteak or an old bantam doing duty for a spring chicken, to protest against the ignorance of modern cooks; winding up always by saying, "Why, on earth, don't they adopt the Falernian dodge, and souse our food, before they cook it, in some acid wine, or even in vinegar; our teeth would then be spared many a cruel strain."

CHAPTER V.

“What art thou gazing on? Fie, ’tis not well.
This casket was delivered to you closed:
Why have you open’d it?”

Fatal Curiosity.

THE next morning after his return from Cheltenham, at an early hour and while the stars were yet twinkling in the sky, Frank was at length roused from his heavy sleep by the appearance of Potts at his bedside, bearing a lighted candle, and doing his utmost to make his master understand the serious purport of the message he had been ordered to convey.

“If you please, sir,” he reiterated again and again, “the Dean’s compliments to you, sir, and he wishes to see you in his rooms at ten o’clock without fail.”

“Then, if that’s all, why on earth have you disturbed me two hours before the usual

time?" said Frank, growling out a malediction and half inclined to throw a boot at the scout's head.

"'Cause, sir, I'm afeared there's summut up; and the sooner you know'd it the better. I brought the message yesterday morning and again last night; but, as you wasn't come in, I was forced to tell the Dean so."

"Did he ask any questions, Potts?"

"Not a word, sir, only sent for the porter and asked for the gate-list; and that makes me think he's a got wind o' summut—kept me awake, it did, the blessed night; but there, I knows nothing, and that I'll stand to before a college meeting."

That was the awful tribunal before which undergraduates and scouts were alike arraigned when a breach of discipline was inquired into by the college authorities; and as immediate dismissal from his lucrative post would have been the certain fate of a scout, if, knowing that a master had slept out, he had not reported the fact to the Dean or to one of the tutors, Potts fairly trembled with alarm, lest it should be discovered that Frank had been absent for the night, and

that he had connived at his absence by not giving, as he was bound to do, the required information.

On the morning of Frank's departure for Cheltenham, his bed having been carefully made by the scout, the former had thrown himself on it and tumbled it up directly after Potts had cleared away the breakfast things and quitted the apartments; so that, on the following day, as the bed again required adjustment, he could not positively assert it had not been occupied during the previous night; indeed, the visible inference was that it had been so occupied; and this view being supported by the weight of a sovereign, Potts was prepared to undergo torture rather than reveal the well-founded suspicion he entertained on the subject.

"I shall tell him the truth, Potts; if he asks me point-blank whether I slept in or out of college on the night before," said Frank, becoming aware of the probability of such a question being put by the Dean in his interview with him.

"Then, sir," gasped out Potts, in a tone of real agony, "you'll ruin me for life."

“Not a bit of it, man; I don’t mean to implicate you in any way; and no one can prove you knew aught of the matter. But for myself, I’d rather be sent away than tell him a lie.”

“You would, sir?” exclaimed Potts, in utter amazement. “Then it’s lucky there isn’t many as follows that rule; if there was, this here college wouldn’t be quite so full as it is in a short time. No! I’m for pleading ‘not guilty;’ that’s allowed by law and has pulled many a gentleman through worse scrapes than only breaking a college rule.”

Exactly at ten o’clock Frank’s rap with his knuckles on the Dean’s door was responded to by a shrill “Come in;” and as he instantly obeyed the summons, the Dean, pointing to a vacant chair on the opposite side of the table at which he was writing, and with the light falling directly on Frank’s face, begged him to be seated.

“I believe, Mr. Raleigh,” he commenced very gravely, “that you left Oxford in a tandem on the day before yesterday; and, as I fear, did not return to your college at all

that night. Be good enough to answer me categorically; am I right or wrong in this belief?"

"Quite right, sir," responded Frank, without a shadow of hesitation, but at the same time in a tone of deference and modesty far from displeasing to the man in power. "Being vacation time, sir, I thought I might take the liberty of running down to Cheltenham and sleeping there for one night, in order to rest our horses, without asking permission to do so."

"A very great liberty, sir, and a direct infringement both of the college rules and the university statutes. The penalty is expulsion; but as you have candidly admitted your error, I am disposed to take a lenient view of it, and to pass it over this time by confining you to gates and putting a cross against your name on the buttery books for the remainder of the vacation. And this, I trust, will be a warning to you never to repeat so grave an offence so long as you continue to be a member of this college."

In the same shrill, unmasculine voice,

coupled with a frigidity of manner that well-nigh chilled the marrow in Frank's bones, the Dean then bade him a good morning and, to his great relief, dismissed him from his rooms.

The punishment simply meant no commons from the college buttery and no hunting for the next fortnight; but, had the sentence of expulsion been passed upon him, Frank could scarcely have felt deeper disgust and disappointment than under the ban of this latter prohibition; he felt as a bird might feel whose wings had been unmercifully clipped; he called to mind, too, the tyranny of old Twigg in former days, and pronounced it a trifle compared with the imprisonment he was now doomed to bear. The cross against his name, however, was, as he well knew, a penalty he could afford to laugh at, one that would affect his father's pocket far more than his own comfort; Cox, Dickenson, or Cripps would administer to his daily wants *ad libitum*; and if the cost were heavier, the supplies at least would be more appetising than the ordinary fare of the buttery hatch. Therefore, so far as the present time was

concerned—the only time he gave any thought to—he considered he was rather a gainer than a loser by that prohibition.

On Frank's return to his own rooms the first person he encountered was Potts; who, emerging from the scout's pantry, where he had been waiting in painful suspense to hear the verdict of the Dean, betrayed by his woe-begone countenance the anxiety he felt on his own account.

“Rustication, sir, or a college meeting?” he enquired in a voice tremulous with fear.

“Neither, Potts; but a cross at the buttery and imprisonment for the next fortnight within these dismal old walls—an awful sell, neither to be able to hunt nor visit my friends all that time.”

“Well, sir,” suggested the scout, his courage rising at the leniency of the punishment and his eye brightening at the prospect of being sent to the hotels and pastry-cooks' shops for Frank's daily supplies, “you'll fare none the worse for the cross against your name, sir; and, as to your friends, if you can't go to them, they can come to you.”

“So they shall, Potts; and I’ll have a jolly dinner-party in my rooms, just to keep up my spirits, every day till the beginning of term.”

And so he did; nor were his friends slack in gathering round him during this festive period; and if debarred himself from enjoying the sport of hunting, they at least kept him well posted in all the performances of the neighbouring packs. Consequently, breakfasts, luncheons, dinners, and suppers, the last invariably followed by bacchanalian orgies, and all supplied by the nearest hotels, prevailed from morning till late night; and never was open house better kept than in these rooms. But pleasant as it was for the time being, the piper must be paid in the end; and a pretty reckoning it amounted to, a pretty commotion it caused, before his claims could be all satisfied.

We will not, however, anticipate that settlement, nor attempt to explain how it was at length accomplished; suffice it to say Watercombe was encumbered with a heavy debt, and the fetters he had forged for himself he was only released from at a late period of his life.

During the whole of this riotous period, however, and, indeed, ever since he had come into residence, Frank, with the consent of her mother, had kept up a warm and regular correspondence with Mary Cornish; and among the many presents he had sent her was a beautiful old clock of the Henri Quatre period, which he had purchased from an Oxford jeweller at a fabulous price. Now it so happened that, when this clock was brought to Heathercote by the Buckbury carrier, Parson Barker and his niece, a Miss Caroline Cuthbert, who lived with him as his housekeeper, had arrived there and were just sitting down to luncheon, when the servant, to whom it was delivered, immediately rushed into the dining-room and announced aloud, "A package from Oxford for you, Miss Mary; and if you please Martin says there's eight and sixpence paid on, and he wants another shilling for bringing it from Buckbury."

Here, then, was a revelation for Miss Cuthbert, who, having been long but unsuccessfully busied with her own flirtations, had now turned her attention to those of others; in

discovering which, on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief, she had become quite an expert. Yet, shrewd and prescient as she had proved herself to be in that art, not a glimmer of suspicion had as yet crossed her mind in this particular case: she had been away on a visit at the time of the pic-nic at Holne Chase; and if her uncle had noticed Frank's decided partiality for Mary Cornish on that occasion, he would have thought twice before he would have hinted at the matter before his gossiping niece.

"A box from Oxford, and for Mary too!" she exclaimed with a look, in which surprise and curiosity were alike blended; "I wonder what it contains."

"A collar of brawn, from St. Ebb's, I should say," blurted out the parson; "this is just the season, and they are famous for it at that college."

"Very likely, indeed; and from young Raleigh—the school-boy, you remember, who went with us to Holne Chase last summer;" said Mrs. Cornish, with some little confusion, which did not escape the notice of the astute Miss Cuthbert.

The maid-servant, however, quickly dispelled that notion by bringing the package, on which was printed in large letters "Glass, with care," within the range of the latter lady's vision; who exclaimed with increasing curiosity, "Brawn, indeed, uncle; it's no such thing; there's something far more precious in that case than a pig's head."

Mary's face became crimson to the very roots of her hair at this remark; and fearing, if a mystery were made of the matter, that it would only excite the irrepressible curiosity of at least one of their guests, and probably give rise to some unpleasant report, she directed the maid to put down the case near the sideboard, and after luncheon to bring a hammer and reveal its contents. Accordingly, after sundry efforts to force the lid, in which Miss Cuthbert, dropping on her knees, insisted on taking a prominent part, the beautiful old clock was unearthed; but, alas! with a label attached to it, on which was written in characters only too legible, the following sentence: "From F. R., for his own sweet Mary."

"Foolish fellow," exclaimed Mrs. Cornish,

scarcely knowing what she was saying, "to throw away his money in this way; I hope, when he grows older, he'll know better how to use it. I dare say he thinks it good fun addressing Mary in those affectionate terms—a style far more pointed than pleasant to my mind; still, he is but a boy, and of course no notice can be taken of it."

The fair widow would have thrown dust in her visitors' eyes by the tone of indifference and almost of censure in which she spoke of the matter; but one of them, the Parson, had already seen enough on the day of the pic-nic to convince him that Frank had conceived a passionate preference for Mary Cornish, and that his attentions were anything but distasteful to the artless girl; so, in spite of Mrs. Cornish's explanation, Parson Barker jumped to the not unreasonable conclusion that the youthful pair had a mutual understanding between them and that the mother knew more than she cared to own at that stage of the affair. And as to Miss Cuthbert; after reading with her own eyes the language of that label, had Mrs. Cornish been educated in all the wiles of diplomacy, she could have

said nothing to divert that lady from a like settled conviction. Possessing too the instincts of a sleuth-hound, no difficulty deterred her in working out a line of cold scent, and even sometimes in throwing her tongue freely when the scent had all but failed.

No wonder, then, that, at a tea-party that same night at Buckbury, she hesitated not to announce, but of course confidentially, to a few friends, the private engagement of Frank to Mary Cornish. "Talk of people being born," she said, "with silver spoons in their mouths; that girl has found a golden one in hers! But, oh! how I should like to be a mouse behind the tapestry at Watercombe, just to hear what Lady Susan, with her proud spirit, says of the affair! though I don't feel certain that she knows all about it as yet. 'My sweet Mary,' indeed, will be a bitter pill for her when she does, that's certain."

The report of a positive engagement, coming from so good an authority as the friend of both families, spread, as might be expected, like wildfire throughout the community of Buckbury; and during the next few days became the all-engrossing subject

of conversation in many a country-house miles away from that town. Consequently, almost every post brought congratulatory letters to Watercombe; written, of course, with the kindest intentions by Lady Susan's friends, some of whom apparently knew nothing of the long-standing feud existing between the heads of the two families, and some not even the name of the lady to whom Frank was said to be engaged. But still the letters poured in, and if the metamorphosis so earnestly wished for by Miss Cuthbert had been granted, her ears would certainly have been pleasantly tickled by the unsparing invectives of Lady Susan's tongue, as she commented aloud on those unwelcome epistles.

Fox-hunting having come to a close and the rivers being as yet too high and too cold for the pursuit of the otter, they were hard times for the Squire at home during this period. Now, some tenant would drop in with a petition for repairs in and around his homestead; the roof of a barn had fallen in, or a rush-grown plot of ground, which would barely feed a goose per acre, needed draining: and now, a farmer's wife, with a long bill for

damage done by foxes, would beset him in clamorous tones for full compensation, as she enumerated the exact number of ducks, geese, chickens, and even lambs, destroyed by those "nasty varminths." The last, however, the Squire never paid for except under protest, asserting, as he always did most stoutly, and as there is good ground for believing, most correctly, that a fox never kills a live lamb.

From these importunities, however, the Squire could and did frequently make his escape to the wild moor; where, communing with Nature amid the silent and rugged solitudes of the forest, he seemed to shake off and leave behind him, for a time at least, the worry of the post and the petty vexations of his home life.

But when he returned to it, whither could he flee from the querulous and nagging tones of his discontented wife? Day after day and night after night the refrain was always the same: "'Tis that Buckbury education has done it all;" till the continuous harping on that one note had almost fretted him into a fiddle-string.

In addition, however, to these daily trials

came one which, far more than the reported engagement of Frank to the daughter of his old enemy, troubled the Squire's mind with the deepest anxiety. A letter from Oxford, written by the senior tutor of St. Columb's, informed him that his son, besides utterly disregarding the college lectures, had become associated with an out-college set of men, who, from their reckless and extravagant habits, were leading him, the tutor feared, into serious debt and difficulties. Subjoined to this letter was added a postscript, intimating that, if Frank was intended for the army, the sooner he obtained his commission the better; as it would probably save both his father and himself from the mortification of seeing his name erased from the college books.

"There, madam," said the Squire, tossing the letter across the breakfast-table to Lady Susan to read; "that's a pretty finale to Frank's Oxford career, and exactly what I predicted from his association with men of expensive habits and larger means than his own. It will be utter ruin to him if he remains there any longer; he must come home at once."

“No, no, Mr. Raleigh; that will never do, at least for the present;” said Lady Susan; who, with the instinct of a woman in such matters, foresaw that Frank would not be twenty-four hours at home before devising some plan for paying a visit to Heathercote. “Why not send him into Wales, to my cousin Herbert’s? He would give him some good fishing in the Taff; and among those pretty girls of his the foolish fellow would probably soon be weaned from the juvenile attachment into which he has been so unfortunately entrapped in this neighbourhood.”

“A very good thought,” replied the Squire; “and if Herbert will have him, that would be a quiet and complete change for him.”

To be of one mind on any one point, connected with the disposal of their son, had been for many years a matter of rare occurrence between the husband and his wife; and even now their accord, with respect to his banishment into Wales, was due to very different motives. His mother—the dream of whose life it had been to see her son connected in marriage with some noble family—

while she deplored his removal from the high-bred set of men who had received and welcomed him at St. Ebb's, only thought of the absolute danger he would incur if allowed to return to Watercombe, whence he would be certain to slip away and feed the flame she would have given the world to see extinguished.

Mr. Raleigh, on the other hand, troubled himself not a jot about Frank's love affair, being fully persuaded it was a mere boy's passion, and would probably burn out as speedily as it was kindled, and that as he grew older he would see the importance and find many an opportunity of making a better selection. But the Squire's chief object was to separate his son from those very men, who, if not exceeding their own resources, were by their expensive habits leading Frank at a hand-gallop into inextricable ruin. So, accepting Lady Susan's proposal, he said cordially, "By all means, let him go to your cousin's; and in the mean time I'll stir up the Horse Guards and get him his commission without loss of time."

The Easter Vacation was then just at hand,

and Frank, having accepted an invitation from Gore Leveson to visit him at Foxbury Grange, in Northamptonshire, had quitted Oxford on the very morning that a letter arrived from his father; in which the angry parent commented bitterly on his reckless extravagance; bade him take his name off the university books, before that disgrace was inflicted on him by the authorities of his own college; and finally commended him to repair to Penhafod, his cousin's place in Glamorgan-shire, till he heard again from him. Frank, too, had written to his father, simply telling him he had gone on a visit to a friend in Northamptonshire, but without giving any further address. The two letters had crossed on the road, and that from his father to him remained unopened on Frank's table till his return to Oxford in the following term.

“By this time,” said he to his steady old friend, Harry Somers, whose advice, although he had shamefully neglected him of late, he was too glad to profit by in the hour of need; “by this time my father's wrath will have expended itself, and I dare say when he reconsiders the matter, that he would much

prefer my holding on as a member of the university, if not of this college, till I get my commission; but how to manage it I cannot exactly see."

"Change the venue, Frank; get your name entered on the books of St. Andrew's Hall, a refuge for the destitute; where, no matter what your habits may be, they are sure to take you in. There you may live as you like; knock in or knock out at any hour; cut chapel and lectures as you please; and hunt, if you wish it, every day in the week. But write to your father and consult him; he is an old Oxford man, and will understand what you mean by a migration to that hospice."

"My father's letters have not been over and above civil of late; Harry; and catch me writing to him on this or any other subject, till he becomes more respectful to his son and heir. No; I shall act on my own hook this time; and if they won't keep me longer at St. Columb's, I'll migrate to St. Andrew's Hall forthwith. The boat-races take place next term; and, as my friend Gore Leveson has backed Brazenose to bump St. Ebb's for a heavy sum, I don't mean to go down till

after that event. Besides, I intend getting a fiver or two upon it myself; for, Leveson assures me, St. Ebb's has a worse crew than usual this year—a weedy lot, that must be beaten; so we are sure to pocket our tin.”

“No! don't bet, Frank; for, win or lose, that vice must bring you to grief; if you win on this occasion, you will be encouraged to venture a larger sum on another, and so establish a most dangerous habit; and if you lose, your father will be the real sufferer, as you will of course call on him for the extra supply.”

“Not a bit of it, Harry; I've now two strings to my bow, and when one fails, I can pull the other. There's a fellow called Skinner here, who is always ready to accommodate me with any sum I may require; he was introduced to me by my friend Leveson, and every man at St. Ebb's, who wants money, goes to him and gets it. He must have a mine somewhere, or a bank at his back; for if, as the old song says, 'All mankind are birds,' beyond doubt he must be a goldfinch.”

“And you, Frank, a green-finch, whose

vitals he'll feed on when he is transformed, as he assuredly will be some day, into a rapacious bird of prey. Be advised in time, my dear old school-fellow, and have nothing more to do with so dangerous a scoundrel. Go to your father ; tell him your embarrassment ; and then, I am quite sure, he'll do all he can to extricate and save you from this harpy's claws."

Frank, who was deeply impressed by this honest advice, might in all probability have escaped the tortures of a life-time, if he had then acted on his friend's counsel with promptitude and decision. But his intentions, however sincere they might have been, were scattered to the winds and vanished, as so many more had vanished before them, to that place which is said to be already widely paved with good intentions, by the entrance of Gore Leveson at that instant.

"Now, then, old stick-in-the-mud ! there's a hurdle race coming off on Bullingdon, and we shall miss it to a certainty, if you hang fire in this fashion !" said Leveson, catching Frank by the arm, and at the same time looking Harry Somers over from head to

foot, as if wondering, from his homely attire, who or what he could be, and where he could have come from—a process of inspection, saying nothing and meaning so much, that, if Harry had still been a school-boy, he certainly would have sent his fist with full force into the insolent coxcomb's face.

“It's a match,” continued he, “for £50 each, weight for inches, between Wodehouse's pony, Gazelle, and Logan's Norna, the latter a perfect heavy-weight hunter, and a well-known mare in Warwickshire; but, except with hounds, she is very apt to refuse, and, I hear, hates a hurdle: so I mean to back the pony. Come along, old fellow!”

The temptation was irresistible. Frank, having already seen the Gazelle triumphant in so many spins over Bullingdon and in Port Meadow (although she barely topped 14.2, and displayed all the characteristics of a thoroughbred weed, being ewe-necked, and stunted in growth by the want of food), at once seized his “beaver,” and, with a significant nod to his friendly Mentor, as much as to say, “I will hear thee again of this matter,” he and Leveson marched off together.

It was simply a misnomer to call the match a hurdle-race; for instead of a slight and frangible hurdle, a single, heavy larch-pole, swathed round with furze, formed each of the six barriers to be jumped; and as these stood four feet and a half from the ground, and were almost as high as the little mare's back, it was surmised they would prove a most formidable fence for her, and, if not cleared, would probably bring even the big one to grief. Still, being so well known for her jumping and staying powers, Gazelle, looking like a star and carrying her natty rider, whose seat and hopeful countenance implied winning to a certainty, became the decided favourite, as she bounded to the post with the spring of an antelope.

Norna, on the other hand, with dear old Logan on her back, a broad-shouldered, resolute man, sitting square in his saddle, and possessing nerves of iron, stood full sixteen hands high, and from her long sinewy thighs, flat hocks, and great girth, seemed big enough and strong enough to carry him over, or even through, a park-wall. She was well-bred, too—a dark chestnut, with one eye

only, and with a turn of speed fast enough, it was said, to go for a King's Plate. But without hounds, such was her temper that, at times, no one but her owner could get her to face the most insignificant fence; and on this ground the backers of the pony chiefly relied.

"They're off! they're off!" shouted a hundred voices, as the little mare, leading up to the first bar, cleared it without an effort; while at a distance of ten or twelve yards in her wake came Norna "of the fitful head," so firmly held and so well put at it, that to refuse, had she been so inclined, would have been next to impossible. But the grand old mare knew better; for just pricking her ears, she hopped over it as if it had been no higher than a fender; while instantly the set, firm features of her jockey, as he caught the "Hurrah!" of a well-known Trinity man called Way, relaxed at once into a pleasant and confident smile.

Wodehouse, not wisely as many thought, now mended the pace; for, light-weight as he was, the ground, owing to recent rain, proved heavy going for the little mare. Still, she

led gallantly over the second, third, and fourth bars, never touching a twig of the gorse, and increasing the distance between herself and opponent at every stride.

"The little one wins for a hundred!" shouted Leveson, wildly, little suspecting that the old mare had as yet only been going at three-quarter speed, and had a reserve of power in her known to none but her judicious rider.

"Done! done!" responded two of the Trinity men, in one breath, as they caught sight of Gazelle, now making, for the first time, a slight mistake at the fifth fence.

Old Logan saw it, too, and taking a fresh hold of Norna's head, he appeared to impart new life to the mare, for she instantly extended her stride, and swung over the fence as if she meant flying into the next county. In a few seconds she had raced up to the quarters of the pony, and as they both went at top pace, head and head for the last fence, it became too evident that the latter was all but pumped out, while the big mare was going without an effort, and was still fresh as paint.

“It’s all over but shouting!” exclaimed Way, as the game little mare, now all abroad but struggling gallantly to maintain her lead, breasted the bar and fell over it with a crash and a thud that made every man on the ground hold his breath for very fear. She was up again in one second, however; and before any one could come to his assistance, Wodehouse, who had held on to his reins, had sprung into his saddle, determined to fight the now unequal battle to the bitter end.

But it was not to be; Gazelle, having badly strained her off fore leg, was unable to put it to the ground; and the old mare, amid the shouts of all Trinity, cantered home an easy winner.

That same night there was a supper and heavy drinking at St. Columb’s; and the next morning, in order to meet the claims against him, for he had lost a heavy sum by betting against the winner, Frank was compelled to solicit a further advance of money from Skinner, in whose fatal meshes he now found himself as fairly entangled as a fly might be in those of a hungry spider.

CHAPTER VI.

“Gay is thy morning, flattering hope
Thy sprightly step attends;
But soon the tempest howls behind,
And the dark night descends.”

LOGAN.

DURING the summer terms of Easter and Act, the great goddess Artemis, whose worshippers at Oxford might be numbered even with those of Ephesus, veils her latent power for the time, and no longer sways the passion of her devotees as she does in the more congenial period of the winter months. The study of the “noble science,” however, if suspended awhile in obedience to the laws of nature, and with due consideration for wheat, vixens, and future hopes, is nevertheless not followed by a closer cultivation of the ethics of Aristotle, nor, indeed, by any other ascetic observance of the duties and discipline prescribed by the university.

When a party of hunting gowmsmen stroll, as they are wont to do on a Sunday morning, into an Oxford stable, and hope to delight their eyes with a peep at some of the favourites of the past season—hunters that have earned their undying admiration, either by the big water-jump, or the double post and rails over which they have been so gloriously carried—they look for them in vain; one and all are banished to some straw-yard in the vicinity, where, physicked, blistered, fired, and with their heads in straight-jackets—playfully called cradles—the noble brutes, now presenting a woeful appearance, are summered for a future day.

But their stalls and boxes are by no means tenantless; for every available standing is occupied by steeds of a very different stamp; wiry, thorough-bred hacks, raw-boned as that of Dr. Syntax, game and enduring as Turpin's Black Bess, and all endowed more or less with the gift of going, are now in demand, while buggy and tandem horses, harnessed and unharnessed, stand prepared at a moment's notice to suit the choice of the various customers as they happen to drop in.

On every high road, therefore, radiating from Oxford to a distance of ten or twelve miles, but especially on the adjoining commons of Cowley and Bullingdon, these hacks may be met in the afternoons of every weekday, usually tearing along at a frantic pace, as if their riders were bearing despatches announcing the outbreak of a European War, or riding a race e'en "for a thousand pound." But, in reality, they are simply taking their pleasure, getting rid, perhaps, of the blue devils invoked by hard reading; or, more probably, blowing off the steam generated by the wassail of a previous night. In most cases, however, where these gentlemen riders are found bucketing their horses so unmercifully, they are, in fact, learning to ride, their education at home in that manly exercise having been totally neglected in early youth. At all events, they certainly are not hunting men.

Then, again, there is the river—the fair and broad Isis—on whose "glassy wave" boats of every form and design, varying from a skiff to a house-barge, swarm in countless numbers through the summer season. In the

former, "the solitary snipe" is wont to take his daily exercise, preferring his own company to that of any other human being; while in the latter a more social lot, on pleasure bent, are gliding down stream, luxuriously towed by a horse, their object being a picnic, and their destination Nuneham, to whose picturesque grounds that grand specimen of an English gentleman, Archbishop Harcourt, notwithstanding the lobster-shells, shivered glass, and other relics that mark their trail, kindly accords them free admission. Nor is the boon otherwise abused in general; except, indeed, as is sometimes the case, an air-gun is carried down by one of the party: the temptation then becomes irresistible; the young rooks on the elms adjoining the Hermitage are loudly clamouring for food, but instead of it a pea-bullet from the air-gun sends scores of them to rest.

The keepers, however, are usually on the alert, and of course a row is the result; the delinquents being brought before the Archbishop, who mildly appeals to them as gentlemen not to do the like again. In those days the north-country beggars, who always spoke

of him as "t' ould Duke," would come miles out of their way, to call at Nuneham, where the buttery-hatch was kept open and a good meal of bread and cheese with a cup of beer was given to every one who came that way; and if a beggar was lucky enough to meet him, the Archbishop sent him away rejoicing with half-a-crown into the bargain.

Numbers of men, too, devoted to angling, may always be seen patiently trolling for pike from the river banks; or, seated in a punt moored to a willow, still more patiently fishing for barbel in Sandford Lasher or in the deep holes surrounding the weirs; while a more ambitious lot have gone off in buggies and tandems to tempt with the May-fly, or spinning-minnow, the big trout of the Windrush; which, however, are so shy that few men less skilled than a Chaplin or a Dale—two Zebedees of Magdalen—are commonly successful in bringing them to hand. Glorious fish are they, either at the end of one's line or on table-board; here, firm and pink and even more delicately flavoured than a Severn salmon fresh run in February, they form a dish worthy of Sardanapalus; there, weighing

from four to six pounds, the butt-end need be handled by no "fool," for they die gloriously, struggling and fighting to the very last kick.

But as the hour of dinner draws nigh, the racing boats, eight-oars and four-oars, returning from their daily drill on the reaches above and below Sandford, bring down hundreds of spectators into Christ-Church meadows, and give a lively and interesting touch to the aquatic scene. In breasting the strong stream near the Willows and in spurting home the favourite eight-oar is greeted with deafening cheers, which, again and again repeated, are heard at Carfax, and find an echo in the distant cloisters of Magdalen College.

Then the manly game of cricket, which is steadily becoming more and more popular, supplies both exercise and recreation to a large batch of "dry bobs," who, preferring the bat and ball to aquatic sport, and to the more costly indulgence of a daily ride, occupy their spare time like sensible and high-principled men, determined neither to tax their own physical powers nor those of their fathers' pockets to an undue extent.

Hard by, too, on Bullingdon Common, the knights of St. Quentin are busily engaged in playing the once chivalrous game of the tournament. Successful, however, as the tilter may be in wielding his lance, here are no ladies' eyes either to reward his courage or his skill; no woman's favour to win as the inspiriting prize; but if he misses the mark, the chances are he gets "hard hit" in another way, and is sent reeling into the arms of mother earth amid the derisive cheers of the competing knights. Then follows the banquet under a spacious tent—a dinner and supper affair combined—to which the members invite their friends, and treat them with so much hospitality that, occasionally, carriages from Oxford are even sent for to convey them safely back to their own colleges.

Thus, if hounds and hunters are in abeyance for a season, with so varied and ample a *menu* provided for them by Alma Mater, even the votaries of the chase need not famish nor pine away from the lack of a daily supply of hard exercise and manly recreation; at least, during the brief period of their University life.

The Long Vacation was now at hand, and preparations on an extensive scale were being made on all sides to celebrate the forthcoming Grand Commemoration, or Encænia, with unusual costliness and gaiety. Balls, garden fêtes, water parties, concerts, heavy lunches, and heavier dinners were to follow each other in rapid succession; and every Don or disciple, graduate or undergraduate, not utterly case-hardened against the sex, made it a point of duty on the occasion to invite not only nieces and sisters, but friends and fair cousins claiming the remotest degree of consanguinity, till every hotel or lodging in Oxford was filled to its very rafters.

“Hurrah, Frank! here’s a bit of luck at last,” said Gore Leveson, waving a letter over his head in a fervour of delight; “my two cousin girls, the Lethburys, are coming up on the 15th, and if they don’t create a sensation in the Theatre and Broad Walk, the verdict of the last London season must have been a false one indeed.”

“Very lovely, are they?” inquired Frank, who hoped to draw Leveson into a fuller description of his fair cousins’ beauty. “If

you're as good a judge of a woman's form as you are of a filly's, I'd ride a hundred miles to get one good look at them."

"Then, by Jove! you shall have a dozen, Frank; but have a care, my boy, they are dangerous, I warn you; and if they don't turn men into stones, as Medusa did, they make lunatics of them in no time."

"But what are they like, Leveson?—tall, of course they must be, or you wouldn't admire them; but are they dark or fair-haired, brunettes or blondes?"

"The elder, Bertha, has a figure that would make your brain swim, so exquisitely developed is it; her complexion is olive, but so transparent that, when you waltz with her, you can see the blue blood coursing through her veins; her hair a rich auburn, long as Haidee's, but filleted round her brow like a crown of gold; her eyes a dark hazel, one moment so soft, the next sparkling like a pair of heaven-lit stars. Then, her teeth and lips; ye gods—but, hold hard! I see your mouth's watering already, and if I go on describing her countless charms, you'll soon be as much in love with her as the mad man was with Cleopatra."

“Nonsense, Leveson; I believe you are in love with her yourself; but go on. What is the sister like; not a brunette, I hope, for I decidedly prefer a fair woman?”

“That’s lucky, Frank, for now we shall not quarrel. Blanche is fair and lovely as Hebe herself; but not quite so plump as it is the fashion to paint the handmaid of Jove. Innocent as they seem to be, there’s a world of mischief in her soft blue eyes; their victims may be counted by scores, and if there’s a weak spot in your armour, take my word they’ll find it out; so be on your guard, I say, or you’ll add one more to the many she has made fools of and then laughed at.”

“In fact, according to the character you give her, your fair cousin must be somewhat of a coquette, Leveson?”

“Ay, as arrant a coquette as Galatea herself; never so happy as when provoking pursuit, but as yet always contriving to elude capture. Give her a turn, Frank; and let me tell you she carries weight and is worth winning; my uncle Ben left her a clear fifty thousand, and you’ll never want meal for your hounds if you get coupled up with her—a fine woman and a

fine fortune! what the deuce could a man wish for more?"

"Nothing on earth could be more tempting," said Frank, remembering his debts, and dwelling for a moment on the pleasant combination described by his friend; "but the truth is, Leveson, I am not a free man, I'm engaged to be married. It's a dead secret at home, and would drive the old folks into a madhouse if they only knew it; so keep it to yourself, that's a good fellow."

"What! taken in and done for already, Frank, and you not twenty years of age yet? No, I'll not believe you could be trapped so easily! Golden locks, I'll wager, without a guinea to bless them. Frank, you must be off that, or I shan't think much of your diplomacy or good sense."

"Impossible, Leveson, compatibly with honour. Even if I wished it, which I most decidedly do not; you have no conception how lovely she is, so gentle, so sweet, and so attractive. No! I should be a monster indeed if I ill-treated her or caused her a moment's pain."

"An angel in petticoats, and nothing less,"

said Gore Leveson, in a tone of merriment and incredulity, that, although meant as mere badinage, cut Frank to the very quick. "But come, old fellow, give us a chance of seeing a celestial once in our lives; have her up and trot her out on Show Sunday! she must be a rare stepper indeed if she saves her distance against la belle Blanche at even weights."

Frank's face brightened visibly at this suggestion, which, strangely enough as he thought, had never occurred to himself. Perhaps he felt, without being conscious of it, how rarely Mrs. Cornish and Mary, since he had known them, had ever moved, or expressed a wish to move, beyond the precincts of their own quiet neighbourhood, in the well-wooded and picturesque valleys of which, with the wild moor behind them, they had lived from youth to maturity; passing, if uneventful, yet contented and happy lives. The wood-pigeon, cooing among the branches of an ivy-mantled oak or see-sawing in the summer air, never loved its native haunts more than they the seclusion of Heathercote, their own peaceful home.

"It will be hopeless, I fear, proposing it,"

said Frank, with some hesitation; "still if I thought there was the glimmer of a chance in my favour, I'd move heaven and earth to bring them here for the Commemoration."

"But who are *they*?" inquired Leveson, provokingly; "I only spoke of your young 'ooman, but there appears to be a bevy of them."

"You're pumping me, Leveson, and only want to find out the ladies' names. Well, 'tis but a brace altogether, mother and daughter, Mrs. and Miss Cornish; so now I hope your curiosity is satisfied."

"Not a bit of it, Frank; I am dying to see what the filly is like; and if there's no paterfamilias, no stern governor to consult, I'll lay a guinea to a gooseberry they'll come up, if you'll only invite them."

That night, on retiring to his rooms, Frank sat up to a late hour writing a touching appeal both to Mrs. Cornish and her daughter, setting forth the glories of the Commemoration in glowing terms, and protesting that his enjoyment of the week would wholly depend on their coming to Oxford and sharing it with him. Then the letter con-

cluded with a postscript, expressing a fervent hope that he might be allowed to secure apartments for them at once in the High-street, which he described as the most central and convenient situation for sight-seers, that street being the chief promenade of the gownsmen and their friends, the route of the public processions, and finally the main thoroughfare for the fast London coaches hourly passing through the city.

It would be simply a waste of time to attempt a description of the intense excitement created at Heathercote by this epistle; nor could any ordinary pen do it adequate justice; suffice it to say that its effect, on one at least of the inmates of that peaceful home, might be compared to that of a sudden thunderstorm, bursting over some placid brook and transforming it at once into a wild torrent, which overleaps its bounds and hurries onward, impatient of restraint: so effectually did it change and disturb the ordinary tranquil course of poor Mary's daily life.

"Mamma," she said, beseechingly, "you *must* accept; it is so long since we have met, and Frank is dying to see us. It would be

cruel to disappoint him ; so you'll say 'yes,' won't you, dear mamma? Oxford, too, is such a beautiful city, and we may never again have the opportunity of seeing it under such pleasant circumstances."

A cloud of doubt, however, seemed to hang on the mother's brow, as, unwilling to disturb this dream of happiness, she answered in a gentle hesitating voice: "I scarcely know what to say, my dear child; there are so many difficulties in the way that, anxious as I am to gratify every wish of your heart, I am utterly unable to see how they can be met and prudently set aside. In the first place, it does not seem to be quite the right thing to accept this invitation from Frank, involving, as it will, hospitality and escort on his part, while Mr. Raleigh and Lady Susan continue to remain unenlightened as to his engagement with you. In the next place, our income will barely admit, without retrenchment, of such an expenditure; there will be the journey to and fro, a two day's affair each way; the apartments, etc., for the week, and lastly, the gay and costly dresses required for such an occasion."

“One-half my allowance” (it was only twenty pounds a year) “will be more than ample for me, when Commemoration is over, as I shall want no new dresses for many a day after; and if you turn out Taffy into the New-take, he will do quite as well for me at grass as in the stable; the dear little fellow will enjoy his life far more, and the cost of his keep will then be a mere trifle. So, dear mamma, there are two points at once on which I can help you to retrench and save money for this expedition. Then, I am quite sure, if I beg him to do so, that Frank will announce our engagement to his father without a moment’s hesitation; indeed, he proposed doing so a month ago, but I told him he had better wait till he had his commission.”

“That was very silly of you, Mary; the matter has been a mystery to the neighbourhood too long, and it’s high time it should be settled one way or the other, for your sake as well as Frank’s; so pray write and tell him so without delay.”

The letter was accordingly written, and by return of post, as Mary had predicted, Frank

not only announced the matter formally to his father, but expressed his regret to Mrs. Cornish that he had not done so long before, fearing, as he said, that she had already suffered some disquietude owing to his taciturnity.

This solution, then, of the first difficulty being considered so far satisfactory, and the money question, in accordance with Mary's earnest petition, being waived for the present, Frank, to his unspeakable delight, was requested to secure a set of suitable apartments forthwith, and, at the same time, all the tickets necessary for the week's gaiety. Notwithstanding his diligent search, however, for he was late in the field, not even a single set of rooms were obtainable in or near the region of the High-street, all having been already secured for the numerous visitors expected on the occasion; and had it not been for Gore Leveson, who, withdrawing to the Mitre, insisted on placing his rooms at the disposal of Frank's friends, the latter might have sought in vain for the needful accommodation.

Owing, however, to this arrangement, and

to the fact that Leveson had either forgotten or neglected to make it generally known among his acquaintance, sundry unceremonious visits were paid to the ladies during the first few days of their occupancy, which subjected them to some discomfiture and no little inconvenience. For instance, the perquier, who had dressed their hair for the University ball, had just quitted the apartment when, as her mother was arranging some mysterious article of Mary's underdress, before a cheval-glass in the sitting-room, a party of three undergraduates, all smoking cigars, and more or less flushed with wine, burst into their presence without rapping at the door, or giving any other signal of their unwelcome raid.

Of course it was a sheer mistake on their part, nor, until some seconds had elapsed, were they able to understand the necessity of beating a retreat. One of them, as he did so, then turned round, and with an abrupt apology, recommended the ladies in future to "sport their oak."

Another case of intrusion, from a very different set of visitors, if not so alarming

in its character, left an impression on the memory both of Mary and her mother never to be effaced. Frank, having escaped from a hubbub of gaiety going on at St. Ebb's, where he had met the Lethburys in all their glory of beauty and dress, had retired to these rooms, and, seated in a luxurious arm-chair, was enjoying a quiet *tête-à-tête* with Mary, while her mother sat at an open window watching The Age dropping its load of passengers on the opposite side of the street.

The conversation between the young couple appeared to turn on the reception Frank's letter had met with at home, and in his anxiety to impress on Mary the certainty that it would be all right in the long run, he said in a voice audible only to her ears : "My father is a sensible and kind-hearted man, and when he finds our affair is no whim of the moment, but the earnest, settled purpose of our lives, he'll give his consent with a willing heart and bless us both. So pray have no doubts on that score."

At that instant a gentle tap at the door somewhat startled the two lovers, and before Frank could move his chair from the close

contiguity in which it was placed to Mary's, the Lethburys, mother and two daughters, advanced into the room.

"Leveson not here?" said the eldest lady, looking round her with an air of unfeigned surprise; "surely these are his rooms, and we were invited here to take a cup of coffee; but where is the host?"

"He is hanging out at the Mitre now," said Frank, somewhat taken aback by the unexpected entrance of these fashionable women; "very forgetful of him not to tell you so; but pray be seated; I'll order coffee at once, and do my best to supply his place."

Already had Frank been formally introduced to the Lethburys at the Major's rooms—and, moreover, it had been whispered by Leveson in their hearing that he was sole heir to the Raleigh estates, which, extending over a large portion of Dartmoor, including valleys, rivers, and manorial rights of great value, his family had directly inherited from the distinguished courtier of that name.

So, whether affected or not by this representation of Leveson's, certain it is that her ladyship seemed only too delighted to take

advantage of Frank's hospitality; saying, as she settled herself in the arm-chair he had just quitted, "A thousand thanks; and if you are quite sure we are not intruding either on you or your friends" (towards each of whom Lady Lethbury bowed most graciously), "we will gladly accept the rest you so kindly offer. And as to Leveson, he may come in search of us, if he please; we certainly shall take no further trouble to find him."

With an air of gentle unobtrusiveness, almost amounting to timidity, Mrs. Cornish drew her chair near that of her ladyship; who, notwithstanding the dignity of her demeanour, had no little difficulty in suppressing an occasional smile at the *naïveté* and simplicity of her hostess' remarks: the one having passed the greater portion of her life in the seclusion of a Devonshire valley, the other in the whirl and dissipation of many a London season.

Nor was the contrast between Mary and the Lethbury girls less strongly marked; these had already undergone a hard training for two unusually gay seasons, and were consequently in rare condition for any amount

of flirtation to which their inclination might lead them. And, in addition to their own personal beauty and charming manners, the fashionable court milliner of the day had done all that dress could do to increase the effect of Nature's sweetest handiwork. So that, where conquest was an object, their shafts were irresistible, carrying all before them apparently without an effort.

No wonder, then, that poor Mary, a country girl, unacquainted with the wiles of the world, and guileless as Eve in her first bower of bliss, should feel the pangs of jealousy in their acutest form, as she watched with silent agony the dead-set made at Frank by Blanche Lethbury, who held him half fascinated already by her attractive conversation and the magic power of her marvellous eyes.

"My cousin Gore tells me," she said, with an almost inaudible sigh, "that you are fond of hounds; and if so, you must come down to us next season and hunt with the Quorn. Cottswell is in the centre of the grass country; we have lots of stabling, and mamma will be delighted to take you and your horses in, so long as you like to stay."

"A thousand thanks! I should be charmed to come," replied Frank, eagerly. "It has been the ambition of my life to see that pack; I've heard so much about it during the last six months: indeed, Leveson is always saying there are no hounds in England to equal them, either in pace or style of work. But, do you hunt?"

"Of course I do; there's nothing else worth living for in Leicestershire; the hounds meet six days a week, and it's the only chance we get of seeing our fellow-creatures. Besides, give me a flying fox and a burning scent, and I hold there's no sport on earth to compare with fox-hunting."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Frank, with ecstasy: "then we are both of one mind on that point; there is no sport like it."

"And remember," continued the fair girl, now fully believing that Frank was already half-meshed in her toils, "the short cuts to cover are as well known to me as our garden walks; so you won't lack a pilot in that strange land; at least, so far as the meets."

"Nor afterwards, I suspect," said Frank, intensely enjoying the hound talk.

“No, not a yard further! with us ‘every one for himself’ is the rule of the field, as soon as the fox is found; and from that moment the run, and nothing but the run, engrosses every thought of one’s soul; and he who fails to hold his own and keep his place—except, of course, in case of accident—will get neither help nor pity from his dearest friend at such a time.”

During this conversation the fair speaker, who appeared either to ignore or to be utterly unconscious of the presence of any one else in the room, was tracing out the arabesque patterns of the carpet with the point of her exquisite little foot, which, encased in a bronze kid shoe and a narrow sandal, popped in and out from under her muslin dress, as if it was playing the game of hide-and-seek to test the quickness of Frank’s vision; nor can it be doubted if even the tag of a fox’s brush, just glimpsed on the edge of some wild isolated cover, was ever viewed by him with a more ardent and rapturous gaze.

Meanwhile, Miss Lethbury had set herself, with all the art and eloquence of which she was mistress, to draw Mary out and to beguile

her from the rapt attention she was giving to the conversation and coquetry of her younger sister. But her efforts were vain; and no ingenuity of hers could elicit aught but monosyllabic answers from the silent and preoccupied girl. At length, when she had almost arrived at the conclusion that Mary was either daft or possessed of a dumb spirit, the room door was suddenly opened, and Gore Leveson, accompanied by half-a-dozen young men, entered the apartment, exclaiming, "Here, then, you are at last! Gone to ground in my own earth; and I've been drawing cover after cover blank in search of you; till I began to think you had vanished into thin air. But come along, Bertha; I've found a nag to suit you exactly; Maggs says he is a perfect lady's horse, can live in the first flight, and is never so happy as when carrying a petticoat."

"Well done, Gore! you're a cousin worth having, that you are, to bring me such good news," said the sparkling brunette, escaping from the tiresome task of talking to Mary, and in nowise disturbed by the abrupt entrance of so many strangers; "I only hope

he's a chestnut, Gore, with a blaze in front and white stockings behind?"

"No, a bright bay with black points; but you must look sharp and see him out at once; for Maggs says 'there is as many customers after him as bees about a hive on a summer's day.'"

"All right, let's all go and look him over; there's wisdom in a multitude of counsellors, you know; and if there's a screw loose anywhere, some one of us may be sharp enough to find it out."

As this proposal appeared to meet with general approbation, the whole party, with the exception of Mrs. Cornish and Mary, prepared for immediate migration to Maggs's stables, which, for the convenience of the undergraduates and the benefit of the owner, stood in close proximity to the gates of St. Ebb's.

Frank, however, who seemed scarcely to know what he was about, hung back a moment or two, as if he would say a few words to Mary before he quitted the room; but a pair of beautiful eyes, blue and clear as those of Minerva, were jealously watching over him, and at once penetrated his too palpable

design. "We can't do without you, Mr. Raleigh," said the fair Blanche, hovering over him like a kestrel over a field mouse; "for I'm sure you know more about a horse than any one of us; so pray give mamma your arm and come along."

Frank instantly obeyed, and the party marched off to the well-known mews.

"Has he pace enough for the Quorn Hounds?" inquired Gore Leveson, as the horse, on being trotted to and fro in the covered way, exhibited a somewhat high action with his fore legs.

"Pace enough, sir?" responded the dealer; "why, he can catch a pigeon on the wing."

"And is he steady at his fences, Maggs?"

"Steady, sir? ay, you may ride him to a funeral."

"Well, so far satisfactory," continued Leveson; "but tell me honestly, can the horse stay?"

Maggs's keen grey eye (the one he always kept open) puckered into a twinkle, as he answered in an undertone, evidently not wishing to be heard by the ladies, "Stay, sir, did you say? ay, as long as a woman in a bonnet shop."

CHAPTER VII.

“What is life when wanting love?
Night without a morning;
Love’s the cloudless summer-sun,
Nature gay adorning,”

BURNS.

It was not until the last grand day of Commemoration—that day on which a brilliant assemblage of beautiful women and distinguished men were gathered together in the Sheldonian Theatre, the latter, amid a thunder of applause or a hurricane of hisses, to be honoured by the degree of D.C.L., and the former to veil their blushes under the shower of pithy and appropriate compliments poured down upon them from the undergraduates’ gallery—that Frank received an order from the Horse Guards, commanding him to join the —— Regiment of Light Dragoons without unnecessary delay; and,

by the same post, a letter from his father, bidding him, before he quitted the University, to forward a complete schedule of his debts forthwith to him. The Squire, moreover, after commenting severely on his son's extravagance, and the precipitation with which he had rushed into an engagement alike distasteful to Lady Susan and himself, positively refused to give his consent to the marriage until Frank had gone through a three years' campaign with his regiment, then on service at the Cape of Good Hope.

Accordingly, the early portion of the brief period allowed him for getting his kit in order, previous to embarkation, was spent happily enough among his Welsh kinsfolk, the Herberts of Penhafod, whither he repaired to fulfil an engagement made for him by his father; for there he had the luck to see, for the first time, some capital fowmarten-hunting, an old-fashioned sport and a most exciting one, still followed in Cumberland, but now almost unknown even in the Principality of Wales; but of it more anon. The last fortnight, however, was passed at home—if, indeed, riding like a wild man to and

fro over the moor between Watercombe and Heathercote, devoting the remainder of the day exclusively to Mary Cornish, and returning only at night to the paternal roof, could be so designated; a course of proceeding fatally calculated to chill the fervid affection ever felt for him by his father, and to widen the breach already existing between them.

“No, never more; never do I wish to see another Commemoration!” said Mary, who, mounted on Taffy, was, as usual, accompanying Frank part way over the moor on his return to Watercombe; “the recollection of those two or three last days will haunt me to the grave. I shudder when I think of them.”

“Then, you’re a foolish little puss,” replied Frank, in a coaxing tone, “to imagine for one moment that the attention I paid Miss Blanche Lethbury meant anything more than mere courtesy to that lady. No, Mary; I should despise myself if I were so fickle; my affection for you, I repeat solemnly, is unchanged and unchangeable.”

“Thank Heaven!” said the girl, fervently, as if her happiness on earth depended alone

on that affection, and she had narrowly escaped the shipwreck of hope dearer to her than life itself; and while she bemoaned the cruel fate that was about to separate them for so long a time, it was an unspeakable comfort to know that Frank's visit to Leicestershire would thereby be necessarily postponed to at least an equally distant period.

Nor were the fears she entertained of her rival by any means groundless. With her womanly instinct, rendered a hundred times more sensitive by the tender passion that now for the first time swayed every thought of her soul, it became painfully evident to her that Frank's eye, at least, was dangerously attracted by the beauty and fascinations of Blanche Lethbury: she saw, too, or fancied she saw, that a kind of family conspiracy had been hatched among the Lethburys to catch him under any circumstances, although his engagement to herself had been made known to them by Mrs. Cornish on the first occasion of their meeting. Nor, unsuspicious and guileless as her own nature was, did she fail to observe

the countless stratagems by which, in the form of sigh, look, and every movement of her exquisite figure, the practised coquette did her utmost to entangle Frank in the meshes she was so busily weaving around him; and when, still further "forecasting the form of care," she anticipated the too probable result of his visit to Leicestershire, her heart fairly sank to the lowest depths of despair.

So, having once shaken the faith of this true-hearted girl, Frank very soon discovered he had an up-hill and difficult game to play ere he could reassure and convince her of his unchanged loyalty: indeed, so effectually had the demon of jealousy succeeded in sowing the seed of doubt in her heart, that only by earnest and assiduous efforts on her lover's part was he able at length to regain the old ground of confidence he had occupied with such perfect happiness heretofore. He did so, however, before the final parting took place; and, although it could not be forgotten, that untoward episode of the Commemoration Week was never again referred to by Mary Cornish.

"How on earth you managed to miss that

fish, Blanche, I cannot understand," said Gore Leveson, as on riding to cover alongside her he amused himself by bantering his fair cousin on the unsuccessful result of her Oxford campaign; "you certainly had him on your hook at one time, and yet, with all your skill, you failed to land him."

"You're wrong there, Gore; he rose shyly, and never was fairly hooked," said the belle, tossing back her handsome head, as if half angry, half amused at the tone of his remarks.

"Rose at the wrong fly, perhaps," said Leveson, provokingly; "got foul-hooked and sharply pricked for his pains. Well, that's a lesson for the young fry to look well before he leaps next time."

"I doubt if he were worth catching, after all," replied Blanche, giving the thoroughbred chestnut under her a smart cut with her whip. "At all events, in his present form, that country girl from the wilds of Devon, with her russet gown and pink-and-white face, whom you call so pretty, is heartily welcome to him and all the torrs he is heir to. He couldn't waltz, and had never seen the cotillon danced; in fact, your young friend,

Gore, seemed only half civilized, and the sooner he joins the Light Brigade and is taught his steps the better."

"Whew! sour grapes, I declare! Now don't be ungrateful, Blanche, after all the trouble I took to put you on a good thing; don't disparage the prize because you failed to win it."

"Don't you talk such rubbish; as if I was in the habit of waging war with young bears, or ever cared a rush for cub-hunting," replied the belle, wincing under the imputation conveyed by her cousin's badinage, and treating it with the most indignant scorn.

"A leg over the trace at last," thought Leveson to himself, chuckling at the success of his mischievous pastime. "Well," he continued, "if the lions and Kaffirs spare him, and he return a hero, it may suit your book to look him over once again; so I'll bring him to Cottswell, if I may."

"Oh! just as you please, Gore; and if I am not at home, he may do for little Minnie—she will be out by that time," replied Blanche, with a *nonchalant* air, as

if she cared not a button whether he came or not; whereas, in reality, Frank had left an impression on her heart that sealed it against all other aspirants for many a year to come, and she would have joyfully waited, not three but ten years, were she sure of securing him in the end.

Leveson was silent for a moment; and while he was meditating how far he could continue "the worry" with safety, the pack, with its full accompaniment of huntsman and servants, appeared in view, crossing an upland field in the distance and advancing at a jog-trot towards the appointed meet. This sight attracted at once the eager attention of both, and, greatly to Blanche's relief, brought her cousin's unmerciful bantering most opportunely to an end.

A backward cast in fox-hunting, deadly sin as it is pronounced to be, is nevertheless a necessity occasionally adopted by the most judicious of huntsmen; in following up the hero of a tale, however, the same practice is constantly required, in order to recover and carry on the line of scent when, by digression or check, that line has been

broken ; nor can the pursuit be well sustained without such liberty. To the cry, then, of "Hark back !" must our followers be now summoned (if haply there be a few left not absolutely choked off by the length and severity of the chase), while we clap them again on the track of Frank, now enjoying his life in that fertile and picturesque Welsh county, called by a native poet "The Garden of Wales."

Penhafod, the old home of the Herberts, dates its origin, according to Welsh chroniclers, to a Norman knight, one of the followers of William the Conqueror ; although long since modernized to suit the requirements of a more civilized age, it still presents, by its frowning battlements, loophole windows, and massive stone walls, all the characteristics of a feudal castle, from which its lord and his troopers could sally forth to plunder, pillage, and overawe the natives of the surrounding district, and bid defiance to any desultory attack on their part. It occupies, too, the very site best adapted for such a fastness, namely, on the brink of a dark and precipitous ravine,

abounding with rocky fragments and stag-headed elms, some of which might have been coeval with the castle itself. In the topmost fork of one of these veterans, the grandest by far in the whole gorge, a pair of ravens had built their nest from time immemorial; and by looking down from a ledge of rock parallel with the foundation of the castle, and close to the entrance of the subterranean passage leading to its donjon-keep, the old birds might be seen, year after year, supplying their ravenous progeny with a daily stock of carrion ample enough to sustain a couple of Southern hounds.

Frank had scarcely been three hours in the house when, after doing more than ordinary justice to a substantial dinner, consisting of pink trout, mountain mutton, flappers, toasted cheese, and oat-cake, all being the home-grown produce of the estate, he was invited by his host to accompany him to the ledge overhanging the glen, "to take a look," as the latter said, "at those black rascals, whose young get more flesh in one day than half the labourers in this district in a whole week."

For a moment Frank was at an utter loss to understand Mr. Herbert's meaning, and concluded he was going to show him a litter of black-and-tan puppies, of which ancient breed the Squire of Penhafod had long been a careful cultivator. The young ladies, too, at table, three in number, who during dinner had scarcely even opened their mouths except to put something in, puzzled him yet more on the subject, saying with one voice, "Yes, you must go and see our lions fed—this is just their feeding time, and with a field-glass you can almost tell what they have for supper. Real freebooters are they, living on plunder, and giving no quarter to flesh or fowl."

"Pardon me, girls," explained the father; "the ravens rarely, if ever, kill their own game; they are simply scavengers, and far prefer putrid to fresh meat. It's true they'll hang watchfully over a sickly sheep or a weakly lamb, and the moment the breath is out of the body they'll pick out the eyes as a *bonne bouche*; but the flesh is reserved for a future meal; so don't paint them blacker than they are, poor birds."

'That's just what you say of the foxes,

papa," exclaimed the eldest of the young ladies, who, having a fancy for parochial work, was engaged to be married, much against the wish of her family, to the Welsh rector of the parish. "Then people do them a great injustice, if they are as guiltless of lamb-killing as you declare them to be."

This was a sore subject with the Squire of Penhafod, whose genial, benignant countenance changed at once from sunshine to shade, like an April day, as he answered warmly, "No animal in creation, I say, is more maligned than a fox. People are apt to lie from habit, or even for mere amusement, but when they can make gain out of the vice, and fools are found to pay them for lambs which the foxes never killed, their inventions become fertile beyond all bounds."

"My father maintains exactly the same opinion," said Frank, "and is convinced that, when lambs are killed and carried away, dogs, if not bipeds, are the real culprits. Nevertheless he finds it expedient sometimes, for the good of the cause, to listen to incredible cock-and-bull stories about foxes, and even to satisfy the demands of those who concoct them."

“That may be good policy in a country regularly hunted by fox-hounds,” replied Mr. Herbert; “but here we have foxes in plenty for occasional sport, without the need of preserving them; and when a poultry-yard has been seriously plundered, I take my hounds up and kill, if I can, the offender. That is the only compensation I ever make, or even mean to make, for damage done by foxes; and as to lambs, I ignore that charge altogether, and for this reason: I own, myself, a flock of five hundred mountain ewes, which, protected by no shepherd, roam at large over the craggy hill-tops of Twyn-y-Garth, and there, among the brackens, produce their young. There, too, in close company, nay, under the shelter of the same rocks, a litter of foxes is annually bred; and yet, when the sheep are gathered at shearing time, it is a rare occurrence indeed for a ewe to appear without her little lamb trotting by her side. Would this be the case, think you, if one of the old foxes had once tasted the blood of a lamb? Would it not then slay for slaying sake (as is the habit of the animal with poultry) a whole hecatomb of lambs?

Would it not also teach the cubs to do the same; and then, the only difference between them and wolves would be that the latter would destroy the old sheep as well? Consider, too, how diminutive are the mountain ewe and lamb; scarcely bigger, and certainly not stronger, than a stout mountain fox; and, therefore, little able to defend themselves if attacked by so active and bloodthirsty a foe. A vixen, it is true, will sometimes pick up a dead lamb and bring it, or part of it, to her cubs; and the remains, being found at the mouth of the breeding-earth, are deemed to be direct evidence against her; but, no such thing; the murder has not been her work, and my verdict will ever be, decidedly, 'Not guilty.'"

Mr. Herbert was an autocrat in his way; and, far and near, as the lord of a goodly heritage, the representative of a family long established in the Principality, and he himself immeasurably superior in intellectual attainments to the county gentlemen of that period, no man said him nay, go where he would through the whole length and breadth of the land. But, irrespective of his territorial

position and other advantages, the Welsh people regarded him with a respect and love almost amounting to veneration; for, when he and his black-and-tans made their appearance in their own or the adjoining county, the natives turned out *en masse* to welcome and follow them to the field, knowing full well that sport, as a matter of course, would be the certain result, and that, nine times out of ten, the death of a fox would crown the day. And then, ye gods! how the valleys rang with the music of the hounds and the hallooing shouts of a hundred brazen throats—the very woodlands seemed to rock with applause.

Like one of his own hounds, Mr. Herbert, when once on the line of a fox, was not easily whipped off; and if his eldest daughter, who was wont to consider hunting as one of Satan's wiles, bringing idleness and intemperance in its wake, had not recalled his attention to the raven's nest, and reminded him that the shades of night were falling on the glen, and that, if he would see the young birds fed, he had no time to lose, he might have gone on ringing the changes from foxes

to hounds, and hounds to horses, probably till midnight; for Frank was a willing listener to such themes.

A narrow and tortuous descent by a hundred stone steps, the last of which were cut out of the living rock forming the foundation of that quarter of the castle known as the Norman Keep, brought the whole party at length to the broad ledge overhanging the ravine. From this convenient and picturesque standpoint, not only could the spectators look down upon every tree in the narrow gorge, but absolutely into the raven's nest, which, with its pair of nearly full-fledged tenants, seemed to be spread like the inverted cover of a rough hamper almost at their very feet.

The birds, aware of the inspection, and apparently from custom in nowise disturbed by it, remained motionless and silent as death; indeed the only sounds that broke the stillness of that soft summer eve were the notes of a wood-dove, cooing a plaintive response to the tinkling of "a hidden brook," as it won its way through the opposing rocks, singing "a quiet tune."

"If they'd only open their mouths," said

Frank, peering down on the black pair, squatted closely together, "I really believe I could pitch a beefsteak into one of them."

"Or a biscuit, if you can handle a quoit with tolerable dexterity," replied Mr. Herbert, consulting his watch and looking up steadfastly in the direction of the dark range of mountains bounding the northern side of the county, then turning his gaze towards the heavens above, as if he were expecting a comet, and knew the exact moment at which it ought to appear. "Very odd," he continued; "their time is up, and I see no signs of the birds far or near; something must have happened to impede their coming."

"Perhaps they can't find food, papa, and don't like to return without it," said one of the young ladies, hazarding a conjecture.

"Likely enough, during this fine weather," rejoined Mr. Herbert; "I can find no flesh for my hounds, I know; though the range of a raven is not to be measured with that of a stupid kennel-man, whose vision is contracted, and his other senses muddled by tobacco and beer. The bird, high up in air, sweeps half a county at a glance; or, if the

carion be lying hid in some umbrageous spot, invisible to its far-seeing eye, still the tainted gale will reveal its whereabouts for many a league, and guide the bird to its prey with an instinct that never fails. The same, too, with the vulture; but not so with the eagle, who, killing his own game, depends on his eye alone for his daily supply."

Mr. Herbert, like many a country gentleman addicted to field sports, had also a taste for natural history, and was about to quote Audubon, Wilson, Darwin, and others as to whether vultures are governed mainly by sight or scent in discovering their food—a vexed question, never satisfactorily settled by those philosophers—when the dissonant, grating notes of a raven, sounding like "Corph! corph! corph!" repeated at regular intervals as it travelled through the sky, fell on his ear and at once arrested his discourse. In an instant, too, the well-known signal roused up the occupants of the nest, to the sides of which they rushed incontinently; and there, on its outward edge, with necks stretched and heads upturned, they stood at their full height in the very attitude of intense expectancy.

“Oh, if only Chantrey were here to see that sight!” exclaimed Mr. Herbert. “Those birds, like the two wood-cocks he killed with one shot at Holkham, would be immortalized in marble. Never have I seen a fitter subject for a sculptor’s chisel.”

In a few seconds the old birds appeared in sight, the hindmost of the pair bearing a most unusual burden, which, from its weight or length, served to impede the bird in its progress through the air as it endeavoured in vain to keep pace with its unencumbered mate. “Corph! corph! corph!” muttered the leader, looking back to encourage the other, as if fully conscious of the difficulty under which it laboured.

Wheeling in a graceful circle once or twice over the glen, and carefully reconnoitring the party on the ledge, the bird in front, descending by degrees, then settled on the topmost branch of the stag-headed elm, and was immediately joined by its mate, still bearing its burden, but as revealed by the field-glass, panting heavily under the exertion.

“By St. Hubert and his hounds! it’s a polecat the bird has in his beak, and the very

one I killed on Mynydd-y-Glew the night before last," ejaculated Mr. Herbert, watching the raven with intense interest through his powerful glass. "My huntsman was in a hurry, and only half skinned the varmint, leaving the head, legs, and tail untouched by his knife; so there can be no doubt as to its identity."

He then handed the glass to Frank, bidding him judge for himself if that were not the case; but he and the young ladies at once corroborated the statement, declaring they could see with a naked eye that the tail and limbs still carried their dark fur, and were unstripped like the rest of the body.

The old birds then descended to the nest, and in a few seconds, like a fox broken up by hounds, the polecat, torn to shreds by their strong cut-and-thrust bills, was speedily dis-jointed and gulped down by the hungry brood.

Frank's predilection for sport, and especially for hunting, being well known to his kinsman, the Squire was at no loss to find amusement for him during his short stay at Penhafod; for there, no matter what period

of the year it might be, hounds and the various game they were accustomed to hunt were never out of season, from the first day of January to the last day of December in each revolving year. At the time of Frank's visit, otter, polecat, and marten-cat (the last animal having become since then all but extinct even in the rocky woodlands of the Welsh mountains) were the beasts of chase—the “*pryfeid garw*,” or coarse game—that provided continuous work for the hounds of Penhafod during the summer months. But, as the rivers were running low, the shy otter, well aware that on deep water depended his chief refuge, rarely trusted them at such a time; or, if he fished a stream during the night, he made haste to secure his safety by returning before break of day to the cliffs of the sea, from the stronghold of which terriers would be powerless to bolt him.

The marten-cat, too, was only to be found here and there in the fastnesses of the Llanwonno and Llanbradach woods, where the craggy nature of the ground gave the beast so great an advantage over hounds that a kill, even with the sharpest terriers in Wales

to help them, but rarely crowned the day. So, as none of the foregoing difficulties affected the wild sport of polecat or founmart hunting (as the beast is called in Cumberland), Mr. Herbert, in proposing it to Frank, was delighted to find the latter had never seen that animal hunted; the only mode by which he is taken in Devonshire being by traps.

“Then,” said the Squire, “I’ll promise you a great treat; and the sooner you are entered the better. The hunting men of Devon scarcely know what they miss by ignoring this sport; so you must take a lesson and teach it them when you return.”

“We hunt the wild red deer, though, in Devon,” said Frank, standing up for the speciality of his native county: “but the polecat, with us, would baffle all the hounds in the world, owing to the innumerable rabbit-burrows with which the land is honeycombed from the Exe to the river Tamar.”

“That’s a sound argument, Frank, and fully justifies the use of a trap for the capture of so destructive an animal; but, mind, it must be a box-trap, with drop-doors at each

end, not a steel gin, or you will be apt to catch a more noble animal."

Although a sufficiently large kennel for the temporary accommodation of the whole pack had been built on the northern side of the castle, the hounds rarely occupied it, except on nights previous to hunting, when a light mess of flesh and oat-porridge was served out to them with a sparing hand. According to the simple and primitive style, therefore, of a past century, they were all trencher-fed, that is, billeted among the tenant farmers of the estate; it being an understood condition of the tenancy that every farmer should rear and maintain one hound for the Squire's use; while, on the other hand, it devolved on him to keep down the noxious vermin of the forest for their benefit.

Nor did the country people for many a league beyond the limits of Penhafod, whether tenants or not, permit this latter condition to remain a sinecure; for, game being scarce and foxes fairly numerous, every week in the season saw some sufferer, generally a woman, wending her way towards the castle and

bearing a piteous tale, perhaps about the loss of her old grey goose, which, from the owner's account, must have been as valuable to her as the one that laid the golden eggs was to its avaricious and short-sighted proprietor. Nor was the appeal of the poorest cottager on such occasions ever made in vain, for the villain that had done the mischief quickly paid the penalty with his life; or, if he escaped, he did so by a miracle from the avenging jaws of the Squire's hounds.

It may well surprise many a good kennelman of the present day, such men, for instance, as Charles Hamblin and Will Boxall, to learn that, notwithstanding this rough-and-ready mode of treatment, the hounds, as a rule, were always in rare condition for any work; no fox too strong, no day too long, although the fox they had to deal with was mountain-bred, wild, tough, and lanky as a Brittany wolf, and the stars oft came to their aid ere the chase was brought to a close. They were a real hard-driving lot, too, those Penhafod hounds; no towlers round a tainted thistle; no dwellers astern carrying a musical tail; and stout indeed need the fox have been

that could live an hour and twenty minutes before them, when they managed to slip away with him on even terms.

Then, as to strain and pedigree, the only kennels resorted to for fresh blood were those in which the genuine Welsh hound was known to be kept unmixed with the English fox-hound, which the Squire regarded as a composite animal; in fact, as a mere cross between the long-legged smooth terrier and the Southern hound—"a noble beast," he would say, "admirably devised for the very work he is called upon to do." For hardihood, too, Mr. Herbert always maintained there was no colour like dark tan; and so long as a hound had good loins, a deep chest, and straight legs, he cared little about the big bone deemed so essential to the English fox-hound.

A description of the polecat-hunting, which at Penhafod was followed on bright moonlight nights in winter, and at peep of day in summer, must now be deferred to the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ At early morn his voice was heard at the merry coverside.
Old Tomboy hits upon the drag, and tells it far and wide ;
Through wood and dale they’re streaming now at a good old
 hunting pace,
And if the burst were not so quick, the longer was the chase.”

Hunting Song.

IF there be one custom of the past which the luxury of the present age has effectually swept away, and which none but the young and insatiable can regret, it is that of taking the field by daylight for the purpose either of snatching more time from the fleeting hours or of stealing a march, at the expense of natural rest, on the game about to be pursued. Young hounds must, of course, learn what manner of beast they are required to hunt, and what to avoid; and such lessons are doubtlessly best taught them before the reeking night-scent is dried up by the morning sun. But this is school-business,

and scarcely comes under the category of regular sport, though real sport it is, and very sweet to those who love hunting and the detail of hounds' work.

To hit on a hot drag, as in the olden time, and to rouse the fox before he had fairly curled himself in his kennel, or had half digested the goose and giblets of his night's supper, is now known to have been a great mistake; at least so far as it was supposed to give the hounds an advantage over the fox, weighted and oppressed by the recent meal. Caught, however, at such a pinch, he is far more difficult to kill than at a later hour of the day, when the food has passed into his inner stomach, and is then unejectable; whereas, when just swallowed, it is easily thrown up, and his pipes are at once cleared for immediate and urgent action.

Hence, in part, the long runs of a former day. The wild animal, disturbed in his first sleep by the musical tones of a numerous enemy, announcing far and wide their murderous object, is off like a shot, and, getting so good a start, is able to hold his own and prolong the chase to an indefinite point

of time and space. Hardened by long tramps in search of food, his condition is equal to any emergency; and runs are on record extending from one end of the county to the other, during which his persevering pursuers have been utterly unable to lessen the distance between him and them, owing chiefly to that start.

But, even with this advantage, the stout fellow will sometimes throw away his chance of life by slipping into some familiar earth, lying temptingly open, and delusively promising shelter and rest, when, with the help of a terrier and a whole parish of pickaxes, he is at length unearthed and thrown to the hounds.

“Now then, Frank, wake up, my boy,” said the Squire of Penhafod, shaking him by the shoulder till the bed-curtains rattled again; “the clock has struck one, and by the time we get a bit of breakfast, the lark will be piping his matin to the God of day; so turn out, or we shall be late for Llansannor Moors.”

“Don’t wait breakfast an instant for me,” said Frank, now wide awake, and quitting

his couch with a spring ; “in twenty minutes I shall be ready ; cut me a hunch of bread and meat, and I’ll feed on the road.”

“The old blood coming out fresh and strong, as might be expected from that good sort, the Raleighs of Watercombe,” thought the Squire to himself, with intense admiration of the lad’s ardour. “No, no, Frank,” he continued, “that will never do ; you must eat a hearty breakfast before you quit these walls. The ground we hunt is marshy for miles, and an empty stomach is apt to invite low fever from the mephitic vapours arising from such places. Besides, the work’s no joke, fagging through that heavy land ; you’ll want all the support a good breakfast can give you.”

Three couple of hounds, one only being black-and-tan, the rest gingerbread colour all over, coarse-haired, and slightly rough about the muzzle, carrying high crowns, long silky ears and grand sterns, arched proudly over their backs, had been sent on the night before to Ystrad-owen, a hamlet which, although some two miles distant from Llansannor, was surrounded by rough, miry ground,

known to be a favourite haunt of the polecat race. Hither, too, accompanied by Evan Llanwensant, a veritable Celt of the ancient type, devoted to this sport in particular, had been despatched a brace of tan terriers, the indispensable *aides-de-camp* of the pack, without whose sharp and energetic help the hedgerows would too often have puzzled the hounds to kill their game. No such specimens of the genuine terrier are to be seen nowadays; none like those of Penhafod. Long-faced, narrow-chested, wire-muzzled tartars, with little drop-ears no bigger than a penny-piece, and much the same colour, lying cosily to the cheek, and thoroughly protecting the orifice of the ear, they would fearlessly tackle the roughest beast of the varmint tribe, and this, too, with never a drop of bull-dog blood to corrupt their veins.

If there were one defect in their personal appearance to which a hypercritic might object, it consisted in their standing a trifle high upon the legs; but this, in reality, as the Squire would point out, was an especial feature in their favour, for above ground were they not needed to live with hounds?

and below it, not only were their long shanks no impediment, but, if the earth proved a rocky one, they were a positive advantage, inasmuch as they could spring upon ledges and follow their game when ungetatable by a shorter legged animal.

In the grey of the morning, and ere as yet even the early robin, the first awake of all our feathered songsters, had piped his simple matin to welcome up the rising sun, Evan Llanwensant might have been seen posted on a "lifting-stock" close to the little tavern in the village of Ystrad-owen, where, with the terriers at his feet and the hounds in the stable, he almost impatiently awaited the coming of the Squire. Slung by a strap to his side depended a heavy bill-hook, while over his shoulder he carried a mandril, or short pickaxe, the tools which the doughty yeoman was wont to use in exhuming the game from his hedgerow earths.

"You're not a minute too early, Master," he said in his native Welsh, as he took off his hat and stroked the crown of his head with the palm of his hand; "they won't be long above ground after the sun is up."

“Then away with you, Evan; let out the hounds, and we’ll fasten up the two horses ourselves,” said the Squire, dismounting and adjusting the halter which, in addition to a bridle, he always used on such occasions.

The hasp of the stable-door being immediately unfastened, out rushed the hounds with a roar of delight, a mode of salutation right welcome to the Squire’s ears, although, for the sake of the sleeping villagers, he did his utmost to restrain them in their clamorous joy. In a few minutes, however, they were all clear of the hamlet, and well at work, an old hound called “Careless” carrying her head high in the air, and sniffing eagerly the tell-tale breeze, as a pointer would do on a heathery moor in drawing on a pack of grouse. The terriers, too, inquisitive as weasels, were poking their noses into every drain and puddle-hole that could harbour even a rat, but at the same time were keeping a sharp look-out on Careless, as if from that quarter the first good news would be sure to come.

“Those terriers,” said Frank, as he watched them with loving eyes at their busy work,

“are so like a sort we have on Dartmoor, that they must be of the same blood.”

“Well hit, indeed,” replied the Squire; “they did originally come from Widdicombe-in-the-Moor. Thirty years ago my father, when guarding the French prisoners at Prince-Town, bought a brace from one Tom French, a man who earned his livelihood by killing foxes——”

“And who,” exclaimed Frank, interrupting him, “has since been converted from his evil ways, and is now living, happily I trust, in my father’s service. He carries the terriers—in saddle-bags, of course—to certain points, and, as he knows all the earths on the moor almost as well as the foxes know them, he is rarely many minutes behind the hounds when they put their fox to ground.”

“So that the terriers are at him at once before he has time to catch his wind, or the fire of the hounds is allowed to cool : two important points, as I know from experience with my own hounds. Then I conclude you don’t stop in that country?”

“No ! you might as well attempt to stop a rabbit-warren as the earths round Dartmoor,”

replied Frank; "the tors and clitters are hollow as a honeycomb, and so numerous that a whole company of sappers and miners would be insufficient for the purpose. So we trust to our terriers, and with their ready help the hounds are able to give the finishing touch to many a fine run."

A line of rough, marshy meadows, leading towards the Newton and Llansannor Moors, at that time undrained, and abounding with frogs, newts, and water-rats, the ordinary food of the polecat where rabbits are not abundant, were now lying before them, and for some time long tracts of ground, growing sedge, rush, and mallow, intersected here and there by broad hedgerows of willow and stunted oak, were drawn without the sound of a hound striking a trail.

"Heavy toiling this, Frank, and never a stroke of music to lighten the march," said the Squire, half vexed that they had not already found.

"Nothing new to me," said Frank, cheerily; "we can manage to keep above ground at all events here; it may not be pleasant going, but it's a Port-meadow com-

pared with the bogs on the hill-tops of Dartmoor; and as to not finding, I've trapsed through the mires of Foxtor and Cater's Beam full many a time without so much as seeing a jack-snipe. But I can't say I ever felt dispirited, not even by a blank day with hounds."

"That's right, Frank. Of all qualities in a sportsman perseverance is the most essential; and *nil desperandum*, Teucer's motto to his friends in despair, should be the watch-word of every man aspiring to conquer in the end."

This trite sentiment on the part of the Squire had scarcely escaped the enclosure of his lips ere he observed two of his most dependable hounds, Careless and Famous, spring over a fence in a great hurry, and, pointing for a willow-bed in the distance, dash into it with an earnest meaning that the veriest tyro could not have mistaken.

"Dyna fe, Careless!" shouted Llanwensant, in anticipation of the music that pealed forth the next moment from that hound's tongue. "Dyna fe, fy anwyl" (that's it, my darling); and then followed a succession of loud-sound-

ing cheers, all given in the true Celtic style, as the rest of the hounds joined in, and roused the sleeping echoes in the distant crags of Penlline.

“’Ware heel, Evan!” screamed Mr. Herbert, observing the hounds breaking out of Pwllwy, crossing the Cowbridge river, and putting their heads straight over the marshy waste of Llansannor Moor. The sturdy yeoman, however, paid no attention whatever to this warning; for already had his eye caught sight of some long scratchy footprints, impressed by the polecat on a spit of mud adjoining the stream—prints that assured him at once the hounds were quite right.

“Then it’s only a hot drag,” said the Squire, as he and Frank floundered with some difficulty through the weed-choked river; “otherwise, the polecat is far too wary a beast to trust to the open when he hears hounds in pursuit of him. An earth, if it’s near, or the thickest cover he can reach, is, as he well knows, his only refuge at such a time.”

The hounds, now in full swing, were pointing for a hanging cover called Coed

Stamby, directly in front of them; and as some strong rabbit-burrows were known to exist on the upper side of it, the Squire, in a despairing tone, expressed his conviction that the wild beast would be one too many for them; that he had gone a rabbiting, and, if found above ground, would betake himself at once to the first earth into which he could crawl. But this gloomy vaticination, happily, was not fulfilled; for, the next moment, the hounds coming to a shallow, lacustrine spot—in winter a pond, famous for wild ducks, but now tenanted only by frogs—they turned again and again round it, enjoying the steaming drag with melodious delight.

“That’s a lucky turn for us, Frank,” cried the Squire, who, with his companions, was now able to overtake the pack after a sharp spin over the sedgy plain.

Almost in the centre of this half-dried lake grew a large bed of rushes, into which the hounds, after careering several times round its margin, dashed tumultuously; and from the close manner in which they searched it, twisting and poking through the long matted herbage, they evidently expected to find their

game at any moment. But the beast was too wily to throw away such a chance, as rightly divined by Evan, who, giving a lusty view-holloa (the usual ruse adopted for calling off Welsh hounds), lifted them at a swinging trot, and holding them on in the direction of a distant patch of gorse, happily hit off the drag right into the prickly brake.

Here, however, they did not hang a moment; but breaking out on the opposite side into a hedgerow, close under Penlline Castle, the round harmony of their tongues changed into a sharper and quicker note. "Mae 'fe ar ei traed yn awr" (he is on his feet now), shouted Llanwensant, with ecstatic delight; and then followed such a wild cheer of encouragement, bursting from his throat as if from an instrument of brass, that the occupants of Penlline Castle must have been heavy sleepers indeed if they were not disturbed in their dreams by the weird and unearthly sound.

The continuous roar of the hounds, too, and the squeaking of the terriers (for they now added to the hubbub with their counter-tenor notes), seemed to be repeated by a

hundred tongues from the crags above, as, again and again, the polecat, beset by his foes on every side, traversed the comb of the hedges from field to field, with a rapidity perfectly marvellous.

Half a dozen times was he headed at open gateways and gaps in the fences, where the Squire, with a terrier in hand, stood ready to nab him as he passed those points; but too quick for both, the active beast shot across the open space like an arrow from a bow, and bid fair, in spite of the odds against him, to gain the rocks and save his life.

“That’s our last chance, Frank — that narrow strip of open ground between us and the hill,” said the Squire, as the hounds were bringing on their game with a steady cry, exactly in that direction. “He’ll be bound to run the gauntlet at that point; and if the terriers don’t stop him there he’ll carry his skin, I fear, for many a day to come.”

The polecat was now forced to his last plank, a double hedgerow, not more than a hundred yards in length, with a gate at the lower end, and the open strip lying between it and the rocks at the upper. Below, in the

gateway, stood Evan Llanwensant, cheering on the hounds, and keeping his eye open on both sides of the hedge; while above were the Squire and Frank, gesticulating wildly, in order, if possible, to scare the polecat from crossing the narrow field, and escaping to the craggy ground which he had now so nearly gained.

To and fro, at least five or six times, did he traverse the comb of that dense hedge, hard pressed by the terriers every yard of the way; nor could he be driven to face the danger that menaced him in front. And now it was a real treat to witness the sagacity displayed by the hounds in turning short as he turned, and in distinguishing the fresh from the foiled scent.

A fox-hound, with his headlong nature, could surely never be brought to such twist-about ways; and even these Welsh hounds, sharp and hard drivers as they were when pursuing a fox, could only have acquired this peculiar excellence by long practice, and the guidance of a master's hand. It may not be generally known that if a young hound be first entered at polecat, to whose scent

he will readily take, there will be little or no difficulty afterwards in getting him to stoop to that of an otter; although, apparently to a human nose, no two animals can carry a more distinct odour, the latter being all but inodorous, and the former the most foetid of animals. Men who have had to do with otter-hunting know full well how long and tedious is the process of getting hounds to take to that game; whereby it must be inferred that the otter is not their natural prey, and consequently that the sport is really and truly an artificial one, both to their instinct and taste. And so it undoubtedly is; for it would indeed puzzle the strongest pack of hounds, already well trained by man, to kill an otter in a fairly deep stream if left wholly to themselves; and an untrained pack, without help, would certainly never be able, except by accident, to accomplish that feat at all.

But to the polecat. A sudden cessation of the cry, which up to that moment had been incessant, brought Evan helter-skelter from his post to discover the cause; but before he could reach the spot where old

Careless was standing on her hind legs, waving her nose to and fro as if to make sure of her mark, the hound threw her tongue with a long steady roar, indicating the presence of the polecat within a few feet of her head.

“Wedi myned i mewn” (he’s gone in), shouted the Celt, with a war-whoop worthy of a Sioux chief; and the next moment, with one bound he sprang upon the fence, wielding his mandril on high like a very tomahawk, as if he was rushing into battle eager to take the scalp of his deadliest foe.

Baffled from his point by the Squire and Frank, and fairly beaten by the chase, the polecat had taken refuge among the roots of an old oak stump, under cover of which he could at least fight for his life to the bitter end. Rag and Tear’em, however, the two terriers, were quickly at him; and even before Evan could strike one blow with his tool to give them more room, a deadly struggle was going on under the hollow stump of the oak, causing its leaves to quiver to the topmost twig.

In another second the polecat bolted, making

a clean bound from the hedge, and springing, as if blinded by the fight, into the very midst of the hounds; and now so agile were his movements that but for one of the terriers, whose nose appeared cleft to the bone, the varmint would probably have escaped the many jaws that were snapping in vain at him on every side. Rag, however, pinned him at once; and then, ye gods, the effluvia emitted from the foetid sacs of the beast would have disgusted a vulture. It seemed to poison the very air, and absolutely compelled one or two of the hounds to fall back and sneeze violently. Frank, too, although not given to be squeamish, was driven forthwith to a respectful distance; while for many a day afterwards his nostrils and even his lungs seemed to be tainted by the pungent and offensive odour.

Well is the polecat described by naturalists as "*Mustela putorius*," for certainly no other animals save it and the skunk are able to confound their enemies by the sheer force of stench alone. This natural mode of defence, however, has been well imitated by the Chinese stink-pots; although, from the evi-

dence of sailors who stormed the Peiho Forts, it may be doubted if the power of the artificial article equals in intensity that of those two quadrupeds. At all events, the British tars stood their ground in that hot and noisome fight; whereas Frank, a novice at the work, it is true, was utterly discomfited on the present occasion.

“Habit becomes second nature,” said the Squire, laughing at Frank, and encouraging the hounds to continue the worry; “when you’ve seen as many polecats killed as Evan and I have, you’ll think as little about this *haut-goût* as those terriers do.”

“When I first went to Oxford,” replied Frank, recovering himself as the light morning breeze freshened the air, “it was the practice at St. Columb’s to smoke with asafoetida the unwary freshman who had courage enough to retire to his rooms before his companions had fairly fathomed the bowl; and the killing of this polecat put me so painfully in mind of the intolerable vapour produced by that foetid gum, when heated, that I felt much as I did then—almost choked by the effluvia. The process may be thus

described: The bowl of a long clay pipe is put into the fire, and before it becomes red-hot a lump of asafoetida is dropped into it, and the gum at once covered with a layer of wet clay. The gas when generated travels through the tube of the pipe, the nozzle of which is quietly inserted through the key-hole of the victim's door, who is usually in a state of somnolency when the cruel joke is being perpetrated. With sudden start he wakes up, feeling almost stifled by the foul vapour; and although he throws every window and door open, it clings for many a day afterwards to his carpet, curtains, and even to his own clothes."

"Poor fellow!" said Evan, who, while divesting the polecat of his skin, had found time to listen to Frank's narration; "that's how we smoke out a badger when we want him to forsake an earth. I hope you were never smoked so, Mister Frank?"

"Yes, once, Evan, by a ruffian called Swig Jones, the stroke-oar of the St. Columb eight, who swore if he caught any one playing him the same trick, he'd murder him as he would a mad dog. But 'tit for tat,' said I; 'the

man who gives no quarter has no right to expect it from another.' So I waited my opportunity, which soon occurred. After a noisy supper-party in my old friend Branksome's rooms, Jones being, as usual, half-stupefied with swig—the liquor he so dearly loved—withdrew to his rooms among the last of the party; and, whether he suspected retaliation on my part, and had received a hint that I was prepared with the materials for smoking him, I know not; but certain it is that, instead of retiring to bed, he was lying in wait behind his own oak, armed with a poker; and in less than a second after I had inserted the stem of the pipe through the key-hole, he threw open the door and rushed at me like a tiger springing on his prey. Luckily, however, I was too quick for him, or I verily believe I should not be here to tell the tale. I bolted across the quad, making at once for a dark passage, leading into the back buildings of the college, when, finding I out-paced him, with might and main he hurled the poker at my head, and with so good an aim, that the weapon absolutely grazed my trencher-cap, knocking

a splinter off its ragged edge, and indenting the wall with a hole nearly an inch deep, leaving a mark and a witness against him not likely to be effaced for many a year to come."

"A narrow shave, Frank, and a most fortunate escape," observed the Squire, with a shudder; "for if the sharp end of the poker had hit you on the nape of the neck, it would have nailed you like a Kaffir's assegais."

"Iss, indeed, just like a spear through an otter's back," exclaimed Evan, rolling up the skin of the polecat, and cramming it into his coat pocket; "but he was a madman to do such a thing."

"Quite true," replied Frank; "the drink had paralyzed his reason and converted him into a dangerous brute. The next term, however, after a serious act of violence, he was peremptorily ordered by the college authorities to take his name off the books, and since that day we have, happily, seen no more of him."

By this time the hounds were approaching a piece of swampy ground, lying between Penlline Great Elm and the village of Aber-

thin; but, although at a distance of at least a quarter of a mile from a low spinney, part sedge and part willow, they darted off at score, carrying their heads high in air, and running up wind directly for that cover. A peal of music then burst forth such as only hounds of the Penhafod type could give; and away they went, clinging to a line of hedgerows, one after another, right into Aberthin; then across the lower portion of Stallion Down, pointing for the solitary farm-house of Llan-quian, and finally coming to a mark under a mass of faggots adjoining the hen-roost attached to that homestead.

Simultaneously with the arrival of the trio in pursuit (for, over the down, they had been fairly distanced by the hounds) appeared not only the farmer and his wife—the latter a very comely young woman, scarcely more than half clad, and carrying a baby in her arms—but the rest of the household, all in a similar state of demi-nudity, and utterly bewildered by the wild hubbub of the hounds rousing them from their dreams at that early hour. The moment, however, Owen John, the farmer, caught sight of the Squire and

Evan the mystery was explained. "Well, indeed, Master," he said, addressing the former, "I did think, sure, it was the Santhilarry hounds abroke out, and a-running our sheep. They be shocking bad ones for mountain mutton, them dogs be."

"Hella ffwlbard yni, bachgen" (hunting the polecat we are, my boy), shouted Evan, observing the look of alarm indicated by the countenances of the whole family; "and he's come here for his breakfast to your pantry."

A suppressed scream from the wife, indicating the dread she had of such a visitor, turned the thoughts of all to the fowl-house, from the rickety door of which, all the way to the faggot-heap, the down body-feathers of ducks and chickens lay scattered in every direction.

"He has been making a good meal, too, I fear," continued Evan, casting his eye regretfully over those manifold tokens of the polecat's rapacity. "But there, don't you fret, Mrs. John; the villain shall pay for it with his own skin."

While the hounds were braying frantically round the faggots, and the terriers endeavour-

ing in vain to penetrate the furzy pile, from which it was certain the beast would not bolt till the last faggot had been drawn, the door of the fowl-house was opened; and there such a scene of havoc was presented as even the Squire and Evan had never witnessed before. From one end of the hovel to the other the ground was strewn with carcasses of the victims. Seven ducks and ten nearly full-grown chickens lay prostrate, all seized by the nape of the neck, most of them dead, but some still sprawling about, stricken with palsy by a bite through the brain.

Verily it was a piteous sight for the most disinterested spectator; but for Mrs. John, who had nursed them from the egg, and looked on them as the pin-money on which the gaiety of her Sunday apparel chiefly depended, it was a blow so stunning that at first she burst into a flood of tears, and then, recovering herself, commenced reviling her husband as the sole cause of the calamity, for not keeping the door of the fowl-house in proper repair. Nor did her wrath abate a jot till she had seen the faggot-rick pulled to pieces, and the wild beast unearthed from

his lair, writhing and fighting to his last gasp in the terriers' jaws.

She then retired from the scene somewhat hurriedly, holding her nose, and coughing violently.

The sun now appearing in all his glory over the line of woodlands known as Coed-mynydd-coch, the sport could no longer be continued with any prospect of success; so, while Evan and the hounds crossed Mynydd-y-Glew and the river Ely at Pont-sarn, taking a straight cut for Llanwensant, Mr. Herbert and Frank were compelled to return to Ystrad-owen, where their horses were stabled, thence to proceed by highways and by-ways back to Penhafod.

CHAPTER IX.

“These words of mine, so false and bland,
Forget that they were spoken!
The ring is on thy radiant hand,
Dash down the faithless token!”

PRAED.

MORE than two years had elapsed after the events recorded in the last chapter, when Frank, now doing duty with his regiment at Capetown, received an order from his commanding officer to repair to a military outpost on the extreme north-east frontier of the colony, to relieve a brother subaltern invalided home from that station. Longing after wild sport, and a closer acquaintance with the big game of the interior, no better news could have reached his ears; and although only three days had been given him to get his kit and ammunition in order, he would have started in three hours rather

than have sacrificed the opportunity of seeing a country he had so long looked upon as an Elysium on this side the Styx.

Hitherto the greater part of his time had been spent at Capetown, either in drill, garrison duty, or social reunions, remarkable only for their monotony and killing dullness ; or at outposts, situated in a region the mountains of which were like burnt loaves, and the plains like the floor of a brick oven ; where drought prevailed and vegetation flourished not ; consequently where game was not sufficiently abundant to supply even the wants of the poor Bushmen, whose diminutive forms and hunger-stricken looks convincingly proved the poverty of the land. But now, much as his luck was envied by some of his brother officers, and loth as they all were to part with him, there was not one who did not heartily congratulate him on the realization of his wishes, and the pleasant prospect that lay before him.

“ You’re welcome to my big Lancaster,” said one ; “ it takes, as you know, an ounce ball, and with plenty of powder will crack the ribs of a rhinoceros like so many matches.”

“And to my smooth bore,” said another; “warranted to carry shot or ball equally well.”

“Above all,” suggested a third, “don’t forget to harden your lead; for if you fall in with elephant or rhinoceros, an ordinary bullet will only flatten on their bones instead of crushing through them. And here,” he added, handing him the following old Indian receipt; “that will teach you how to manufacture the harder and heavier material.”

“To twelve pounds of lead add one of quicksilver; when the lead has been melted in a cauldron, take out a ladleful at a time, and add to it a proportionate quantity (1 to 12) of the quicksilver, stir the compound well with a red-hot poker, and when thoroughly amalgamated, pour it into a mould.”

“One word more,” continued the last speaker; “never fire point-blank at the forehead of an African elephant, for the skull being convex and helmet-shaped, the ball will glance from it as from the point of an iron wedge.”

Frank’s preparations were soon made; but before we follow him to the distant and

isolated station to which he had been appointed, a region inhabited by Kaffirs, scarcely less wild than the beasts they hunted, it will be necessary to revert to his position at home, and the change that was taking place in his father's views on the subject of his son's engagement with Mary Cornish.

Soon after Frank's departure for the Cape, Miss Caroline Cuthbert, who, it will be remembered, was niece and housekeeper to her bachelor uncle, the Rev. Waldron Barker, the Rector of Buckbury, despairing of matrimony with one of her own class in life, had accepted the attentions of an aspiring bagman, and, to her uncle's intense disgust, had eloped with him under circumstances he, the uncle, could never forgive. In front of the Red Lion, and in face of the whole town, she had taken her seat beside him on the box of his travelling phaeton, laden with goods; and, moreover, having been privately married by license elsewhere, had given a guinea to the bell-ringers, who, without asking the permission of the Rector, were ordered to ring a peal, and announce the happy event to him and his parishioners at the same time.

Now, Waldron Barker, being a large landed proprietor, a magistrate for the county, and the rector of a valuable town living, the advowson of which was vested in his own family, had long been regarded as king, priest, and prophet in that district; it was natural enough, therefore, that he should view the conduct of his niece as a personal outrage and a public scandal. Hitherto, according to conjecture, Miss Cuthbert had occupied a prominent place in her uncle's will; but now it was confidently whispered among those who knew him best, that if her name were mentioned in that document, it would be as the inheritor only of a single shilling.

Not a week had elapsed after this untoward event when Barker, smarting keenly under it, and still nursing his wrath, although to no human being as yet had he spoken a word on the subject, ordered his horse to be saddled, and mounting him in the stable-yard rode direct for Heathercote.

Mary Cornish was out on the moor riding Taffy; but the fair widow, her mother, being at home, greeted his arrival with the warm

cordiality she had ever felt towards so true a friend; for, since the death of her husband, the kind-hearted parson had not only cheered her with his sympathy, but had guided her by his counsel through many a strait of worldly trial; and as to Mary Cornish, he had long looked upon her as a little daughter.

"I am glad to find you alone," he said; "for I have been so mortified of late, that I doubt if I have courage enough to mention the matter before a third person, not even before Mary. But vent it must have; so pray pardon me if I select you to be my safety-valve, as I find it impossible to smother my indignation any longer."

"It's a sad business, indeed," responded the widow, anticipating, with a sympathetic sigh, the tale of scandal he was about to unfold. "Of course I have heard it on all sides, but always with more regret on your account than for the foolish woman whose unseemly conduct has given you so much pain."

Encouraged by this prelude, and feeling secure both of the confidence and sympathy of his listener, the parson then made a clean breast of it, decanting the whole stock of his

troubles to the last drop ; and finally dwelling with especial dread on the lonely home-life to which he should henceforth be condemned. How much further he might have committed himself on that point it is impossible now to say ; for Mary, coming in from the moor, and rushing up to welcome him with her wonted delight, brought the current of his conversation to an abrupt check, and turned it at once into another channel.

Already had his afternoon visit been prolonged till the waning sun, now casting a glow of light on the craggy and sombre tors of the surrounding hills, had left the valley of Heathercote wrapt in shade. The night-jar was on wing, uttering its grating cry, as, whirling and twisting round the oak trees, it pursued the moths and fern-webs flitting among their branches. Darker and darker grew the vale, nor were the golden tints of autumn longer visible on the hanging woods. As her visitor, however, seemed still inclined to linger on, it required little or no persuasion on Mrs. Cornish's part to induce him to stay and partake of their evening meal ; indeed, Mr. Barker, from their long friend-

ship, might have been sure of a welcome at that table without even waiting for an invitation at all.

The fair widow having left the room for a few minutes to make some little change in their knife-and-fork tea, a sudden exclamation from Mary, who was standing at a bow window commanding the entrance gate at the foot of the lawn, announced the approach of another visitor, not altogether unexpected, it would seem, by the disconcerted girl.

“It’s that man again, I declare,” she said, with an audible sigh; “that odious Dr. Twigg; what on earth can he want here so often, pestering us with his company? I only wish mamma would take courage, and once for all say ‘not at home’ to him.”

“He’s no favourite of yours, Mary, that’s evident; but what does your mother say to his visits? they may not be so unwelcome to her as to you.”

A crowd of thoughts crossed the parson’s mind as he put that question to Mary, and looked for an answer with an interest too palpable to be concealed.

“Mamma is too good-natured; and, as you

know, shrinks from giving pain to any one ; but I verily believe she dislikes the doctor's visits quite as much as I do. He must be a great hypocrite, I'm sure ; for, although he smiles, and smiles, and is painfully polite to mamma, I know for certain that he's frightfully cruel, pulls bunches of hair out of his pupil's heads, and nearly kills them at times by knocking them down with a dictionary. I couldn't like such a man, however amiable his manner might be."

An ordinary observer of the human countenance might have seen a gleam of hope lighting up the eye of Barker at that moment ; but before he could express an opinion as to whether he considered that estimate of the doctor's character a just or an unjust one, the heavy tread of the pedagogue was heard in the hall, and immediately, in full conversation with Mrs. Cornish, he entered the room. For a second or two he appeared dumb-founded—" *vox faucibus hæsit* " — as by the dim light he discovered the figure of a man filling the arm-chair he was wont to occupy, but could not instantly make out who he was. " My sight, I believe, is failing me," he

said at length, "and must be bad indeed not to recognize at once the Rector of Buckbury, and so old a friend." They then shook hands with much apparent cordiality, though it cannot be doubted that, as they did so, a strong suspicion shot like an electric flash through the mind of each as to the object of the other's visit, that object being one and the same—the hand of the fair widow.

"Like brothers tried," however, they sat down socially together, played several games of quadrille with unflagging interest, and, if the flame of jealousy had already been kindled in their hearts, they at least had the good taste not to allow a spark of it to affect their outward demeanour in the presence of the fair hostess.

"We've not set eyes on you for more than a month past," said Mary Cornish, addressing Mr. Barker especially, as the two gentlemen rose to depart; "but now" — this she added in an undertone, alluding to his lonely home — "you must come and spend the long winter evenings with us very often. Mamma will be so glad to see you, and so shall I."

"And we'll have some nice gallops over

the moor, Mary, and talk about some one who is now far away over the seas, but who, I trust, will soon be home to bless you and cheer us all with his company. You shall see me soon again."

A gentle pressure of the hand was all the reply the true-hearted girl could venture to give; for the violence Frank had endured under Dr. Twigg's rule ever haunted her memory, and she shrank instinctively from even alluding to her hero in the presence of the man who had treated him so cruelly.

For some weeks antecedent to the meeting of the two gentlemen on that occasion, a rumour as to the object of Dr. Twigg's frequent visits to Heathercote had been privately circulated in the neighbourhood, and, although it had not yet reached Barker's ears, the Rev. Llewellyn Powell, his curate at Blackydown, had heard it from Mrs. Cornish's gardener, who, on the unquestionable authority of her own maid, had gone so far as to say, "Dr. Twigg was a-going to be married to his mistiss; that he'd a-bin a-courting her for years, and 'twas high time zummut should come o't."

Now, although there was just a colouring of truth in that statement (for doubtless the doctor had so aspired, and had many times proposed for the lady's hand, but had as often been refused), there was quite enough background for the eaves-dropper, which, in fact, the maid had been, to paint a fine picture upon it. Hence originated a batch of troubles affecting the ladies at Heathercote for many a year to come, and tinging poor Mary's prospects with a cloud of sadness for the rest of her life.

Llewellyn Powell, who, it will be remembered, had been Frank's *fidus Achates* at Buckbury, his tutor on the stream, his "guide, philosopher, and friend," had kept up a regular correspondence with his old chum from the day he quitted school to the period at which we left him preparing to start on a hunting expedition in the country of Dingaan, a warlike chief of the Zulus, to whom Frank had obtained an especial introduction.

In the next budget of news, therefore, conveyed by Powell's pen, the very important information brought by the gardener was of

course included ; and, as the former, in his fishing excursions on the Heathercote brook, had repeatedly fallen in with the doctor in that neighbourhood, he added his own conviction that, in this case, rumour for once would prove to be true. Alas ! little did he suspect the keenness of the cut he was then inflicting on Frank's feelings ; for more and more had the sense of degradation caused by Twigg's brutality grown upon him of late, insomuch that he absolutely loathed the very mention of the tyrant's name.

The baggage-waggon conveying the guns, ammunition, and personal kit of himself, and a brother officer, called Lockwell, who had obtained leave to accompany him, had already left head-quarters for some hours, when, just as Frank and his friend, mounted on a couple of wiry little steeds bred in the colony, were about to follow on the same track, letters from England were announced, and after a short detention, handed to them before they quitted the barrack-yard.

“ A letter again, I declare, from that good fellow, Powell,” exclaimed Frank, as his eye caught the well-known handwriting of his

friend among the packet addressed to him ; “ I hope he has killed the first woodcock in the country, or landed that big trout he talked about when he last wrote ; for he has always something pleasant to relate in the sporting line.”

“ So he has, Frank ; but pray reserve it till we reach our night-quarters, and give me the benefit of it then,” said Lockwell, between whom and his brother-subaltern a community of goods had long prevailed, even to sharing the good or bad news of each other’s letters. “ The best column in ‘ Bell’s Life ’ is not half so great a treat to me as one of that man’s letters ; he seems so thoroughly to understand the noble science of venery in all its varieties, and to treat his subject as if he really loved it.”

Accordingly, after supper, when their horses and oxen had been duly secured, and the Hottentots who accompanied them were giving sonorous tokens of the sleep they were enjoying after their day’s labour, Lockwell lighted his pipe, and calling on Frank to produce Powell’s letter, he begged to hear it from beginning to end.

As it turned out, however, never as yet had so unwelcome a task fallen to Frank's lot; for, instead of the usual interesting details on the subject of sport, the letter contained little else beyond the gossip relating to the engagement of Dr. Twigg to Mrs. Cornish, the most sickening news it could possibly have conveyed. Still, as there were no secrets between the friends, Frank struggled through it bravely; although, as Lockwell could not fail to perceive, his voice became tremulous with emotion long before he had arrived at the last word.

"This is an unexpected blow, and one that cannot but affect my future life unfavourably," he said at length, with an unmistakable air of pain and vexation. "No, it cannot be; I'd rather have a Kaffir for my father-in-law than that beast, old Twigg; and if he comes to live at Heathercote, I'll never again cross its threshold."

"Nonsense, Frank; you're a deal too fond of that girl to dream of breaking with her on that account; nor can you do so with honour on such a plea, however odious the man may be. At all events, I should do nothing in a

hurry ; for this engagement may turn out to be mere moonshine, the creation of a fanciful brain, rather than a real fact ; so wait awhile, I say, till you have it authenticated by some member of your own or the lady's family."

"It's too true," responded Frank, despairingly ; "I have seen them together on more occasions than one, and the form of Proteus himself couldn't have changed more rapidly than did old Twigg's on coming into the presence of the fair widow ; one moment he might be seen scowling on us like a scaly dragon ; the next saw him transformed before her into a bland and silver-tongued courtier. Powell, too, is not the man to depend on mere idle gossip ; for he confirms the report by his own experience, having repeatedly seen the old sneak in that neighbourhood, doubtlessly going to or returning from the lady's house. No ! the very idea of Twigg's becoming dictator at Heathercote, and my step father-in-law, is so repugnant to my feelings that I'd flee to the ends of the earth rather than own him in either capacity."

In vain did his friend Lockwell plead that the lady's maid, gardener, and even Powell

might all be wrong in their conclusions ; that the doctor might have other motives than those of matrimony for visiting the lady, and that, at all events, it was Frank's duty to ascertain the facts of the case from Mary Cornish herself, before he broke off his engagement with her on the sole information of Powell's letter. No argument, however, sufficed to remove the unwelcome thought from his mind that, on his return home, he should find "old Twigg and his big dictionary" ruling the roast at Heathercote, and settled there for life,—the home he had himself fondly hoped to occupy during his father's reign at Watercombe ;—and so deep-rooted did this conviction become that often it would haunt him in his dreams ; nay, even when engaged in stalking the wildest beasts of the forest, the vision of his early tyrant would rise before him and effectually mar the pleasure of his sport.

During this fever of vexation, which gave him no rest by night or by day, he had advanced so far into the wilds of Kaffraria that, unless he had despatched a special messenger for his letters to Capetown, he could neither hear

from nor communicate with the civilized world. Meanwhile, the first impression made by Powell's startling news, instead of being gradually weakened by the strange and exciting scenes through which he was daily passing, continued to gain a yet firmer hold on his feelings, until at length, overpowered by the horror of becoming son-in-law to Dr. Twigg, he came to the resolution that, no matter what the cost might be, he would break off his engagement with Mary rather than be connected with such a man.

With this determination, which, to do him justice, he had arrived at with much pain and many misgivings, his first work, on reaching the station, was to write an elaborate letter to Mary Cornish, wherein, after expressing his unqualified antipathy to Dr. Twigg, and the strong repugnance he felt at the prospect of becoming a connection of his, he concluded by hoping her happiness would only be temporarily disturbed if he asked her to consider their engagement as henceforth at an end.

The letter, however, it so happened, never reached its destination, owing to the bad

faith of the Kaffir to whom it was entrusted; nevertheless, Frank, not being aware of that fact, continued for months wandering in pursuit of sport, even to the sources of the Limpopo, a well-wooded and mountainous region inhabited by the Bahurutsi and Bakone tribes, under the full impression that it was all off between him and Mary, and that no tie stronger than that of friendship could for the future exist between them.

More than once did Lockwell, his honest and true-hearted companion, attack him on the subject; and one night when he was moralizing with strong emphasis on the faithlessness of man to woman, Frank cut him short by saying, "The body of that beast, I tell you, interposes an impassable gulf between us; and whatever remorse I may at first have felt, I am daily becoming more and more satisfied that, with regard to my future happiness, I have only taken a necessary step."

"But what of the poor girl's happiness, Frank? You have probably wrecked that for life," persisted Lockwell, who was a firm believer in the immutability of woman's first love.

The roar of a lion at that instant gave no time for an answer ; and as the shrieks of a Kaffir at the same moment fell on their ears, there could be little doubt that, notwithstanding the bright fire and strong circular palisade, within which the oxen and men were all lying dozing or asleep together, the beast had cleared the fence and at once seized his prey. Happily he had selected one of the former, but as the ox, with the lion on his back, rolled headlong against a Kaffir just waking from his sleep, the man yelled with fear, believing himself to be the victim on which the lion had pounced.

To bring two rifles to bear on him from the front of the waggon was the work only of a few seconds ; but more than a minute elapsed before either Frank or Lockwell dared to touch a trigger, lest in the panic that ensued, men, cattle, and lion being mingled in one mass together, they should miss their mark and kill one of the men. With a mighty crash, however, the oxen, no less than eighteen in number, burst through the fence ; then the Kaffirs, released from the danger of being knocked down and trodden to death, bravely

picked up their assegais, and in another moment prepared to attack the slayer as he stood astride of his victim, tearing at his flesh, cracking his neck-bones, and growling defiance at the foes that would dare intrude on his feast. Crack, crack, however, went the two rifles simultaneously, and the lion, making a tremendous somersault clean over the nearest Kaffir, fell dead at his side.

After that event, discovering the insecurity of both fire and fence as the protection against the assault of a hungry lion, the Kaffirs took to the trees by night, and flatly refused again to encounter the risk of sleeping on the ground in the face of so watchful and dreaded an enemy. Nor were they singular in adopting this mode of aërial habitation as their only safe refuge in a land literally infested with lions; for, on advancing still further towards the Keishan Mountains, great was the astonishment of Frank and his friend to find gigantic trees bearing on their branches a whole colony of huts, the human rooks passing from one to the other with as much confidence as if they had wings and not hands and feet alone to trust to. The baobab, or

monkey-bread tree, is the one chiefly selected by the Bakones for this purpose, and so broad and beam-like are its branches that no less than twenty huts, each inhabited by a distinct family, are sometimes constructed in a single tree.

Moreover, it would almost seem as if Nature had intended that the baobab should be thus tenanted; for, in addition to the refuge it affords by night to its inhabitants, it provides them also with one of the first wants of life in a most remarkable way.

The colossal trunk, which is sometimes a hundred feet in circumference, is very liable to decay, and, as that process commences at the head of the bole and continues downwards, a vast reservoir is formed in the centre of the tree, which, being filled with water during the rainy season, proves a treasure of priceless value in that arid land; for, being protected from the rays of the sun by a covering of dense foliage, it keeps for a long time perfectly sweet and pure. The fruit, too, which is very farinaceous and resembles a thick cucumber in appearance, is eaten by the Bakones in times of scarcity only, although

it is eagerly sought for and devoured by their more agile neighbours, the monkeys of the adjoining trees.

High mountains covered with majestic woodlands up to their very summits, deep glens and valleys now fresh with verdure, streams brimming with clear and excellent water, and wending their way in many a tortuous course towards the Indian Ocean, characterizes the lovely country into which Frank and Lockwell are now penetrating in pursuit of sport. But the lion rules the land, "monarch of all he surveys," preying alike on man and beast with little or no dread of either. Hence the native, powerless to oppose him, and living in hourly terror of becoming his next victim, takes to the trees by night as his only refuge; and even by day a sense of the danger to which he is exposed is the ever-present and ruling thought of his mind.

"What a life to lead is that of these poor Bakones!" said Frank, as he sat on the floor of a tree-hut twenty-five feet above the ground, and was helping himself to some locust-flour which one of the many woman-

tenants of the tree had pressed upon him. "Well may it be said, Jack, that one half of the world knows not how the other half lives. I should like to form an alliance with these wretched people, bring our regiment to their aid, and, for the sheer sake of humanity, do battle with their enemies—the lions—for the remainder of our time in Africa."

"It would be a delightful campaign," responded Lockwell, "and one that would bring far more honour, if not glory, to the British arms than potting Kaffirs in the Waterkloof, and robbing them of their hereditary soil."

To recount the many startling incidents of our travellers' sport, and the vast variety of game they met with, from the elephant of the forest to the gazelle and ostrich of the plain, would be at best but a tedious repetition of the tales already so well told by Cornwallis Harris, Gordon Cumming, Sir Samuel Baker, and other African hunters. But one encounter with a lion, out of whose jaws Lockwell escaped by the skin of his teeth, so far exceeds any adventure described by

those gentlemen, that, although the particulars will still be remembered by many an old soldier of that period, the record of them in the next chapter will, as we believe, interest all who love sport and admire heroism.

CHAPTER X.

“Oh, gather the dew while the freshness is on,
Roses and maidens they fade in a day;
Ere you’ve tasted the sweetness the morning is gone:
Love at your leisure, but wed while you may.”

WHYTE MELVILLE.

FRANK and Lockwell had now been more than a month in this land of lions—the slopes of the Keishan Mountains—killing all kinds of big game, with the exception of hippopotamus (the streams of that hilly region being too rapid and too shallow for that unwieldy beast to take his pastime therein), when they were surprised by the welcome arrival of two officers and a large party of hunting Mantatees, who, for the sake of the game they shot, had accompanied them from the sterile region surrounding the station to which they were attached.

Having heard from head-quarters of the

expedition on which Frank and Lockwell had started, their two friends, Maltby and Jack Manners, the latter a subaltern in the Cape Mounted Rifles, and both the most expert and fearless lion-hunters in the whole colony, had immediately applied for leave to follow them. This being readily granted, they had used all diligence in their endeavours to overtake them; but such were the obstructions of the rough and roadless country through which they passed, such, too, the herds of countless deer and antelope claiming their attention on every side, that it was just three weeks after their departure before they succeeded even in hitting the track of Frank's waggon.

"You've come to us in the very nick of time," said Frank, grasping Maltby by his left hand, the right being in splints, and resting helplessly in a sling. "Our last ox was killed yesterday by the lions; and if it had not been for the refuge afforded by that waggon, they would have nailed us to a certainty. Our two Hottentots and Kaffirs are so terror-stricken that they desert us by night and roost in the trees; so, with none

but our two selves to guard the cattle, the lions have made a clean sweep of them, and left neither hoof nor horn to tell the tale. To add to our misery, both our horses bolted a week ago, and by this time have doubtless been secured by the Matabili or devoured by the lions. But what's happened to your arm, old fellow?"

"Only a rough scratch from a lioness, that's all," said Maltby, with indifference. "It happened just two days ago; but I dare say it will be all right again soon. If she had not bitten my gun-barrels in two I could have forgiven the brute."

"He won't make too much of it," interposed Manners, "for the truth is, it was entirely his own fault. The lioness was asleep, and he must needs bowl a stone at her, saying as he did so, that 'he should be sorry to take an undue advantage of any brute, and would far rather give it a chance than shoot it while asleep.' The lioness, on being thus roused, turned her back and bolted at once; but, awkward as the shot was, Maltby put both balls into her; the one entering the neck and the other smashing

the bone of one of her hock-joints. With a roar and a yell, deeper, but not less expressive of intense pain than the scream of a horse in his agony, the suffering brute wheeled round, and dashed straight at him. Unfortunately, he was standing at that instant exactly between me and her ; so that I must inevitably have hit him if I had attempted to stop her. A blow in the shoulder from the fore paw, as he turned his feather-edge to the foe, brought Maltby to the ground like a fallen pine ; but as he crammed his gun crossways into the lion's jaws, and so, for an instant, prevented her from seizing him with her teeth, I took a steady aim and sent a two-ounce ball right through her heart. His arm is, I believe, broken ; and I hope that will be a lesson to him not to kick up a lion out of his lair, as he would a hare out of her form—never to be such a Quixote for the future."

Maltby only listened and laughed at this account of his rash courage ; adding, however, his deep regret that, from the loss of his best gun and his maimed condition, he should be unable to play an active part

in punishing the lions that had made such havoc of Frank's team. Although many a lion had already bitten the dust under both Lockwell's and Frank's fire, the numbers that survived, headed by an old king with a head and mane of gigantic size, had become so daring in their attacks, that neither a blazing wood fire, nor the report of guns, nor the curses of the natives, availed at all, during the gloom of night, to scare them from the prey; and even by day they lurked in the scrub at no great distance from the waggon, ready to pounce on any man or beast that strayed away singly beyond its protection.

In fact, when Maltby and Manners reached them, they were literally blockaded by lions, and in urgent need of the succour so opportunely brought at that moment; for, had it not been for the help afforded by a crowd of friendly Bakones, who followed in their wake, feasting and fighting over the fallen carcasses of buffalo, rhinoceros, and camelpard, at the same time scaring away the lions by their noise and numbers, Frank and Lockwell, with their small party, would have

found it a most dangerous proceeding to have continued their hunting in that district for a longer time.

Owing to their constant success in carrying off the cattle, the lions had become daily more and more venturesome in their depredations, insomuch that a Bakone woman and child, who were gathering firewood at a short distance from the baobab tree, in the huts of which (built among the branches twenty feet above the ground) they lived like so many monkeys, were snapped up in the sight of the whole village, then congregated under its shade at mid-day. This, too, happened on the very morning of Manners' and Maltby's arrival.

To exaggerate, therefore, the delight felt by Frank on seeing his two friends approach, accompanied by so strong a party, would be scarcely possible. He almost danced with joy at the prospect of having what he called "a fair go-in" at the lions; vowing that now he would not quit the locality until he had reduced their number, and released the wretched natives from the bondage in which they had been so long held.

Nor was the reliance he placed on those two men ill-founded; both had acquired high reputation in the colony as mighty hunters of the lion; they were, of course, crack shots; and although the courage of both equalled that of the Horatii, Maltby's intrepidity was said to be of so cool and chivalrous a character that, as we have seen, he would rather throw away a chance than take what he chose to consider an unmanly advantage of the fiercest foe. Jack Manners had no such compunction; he would have bearded a lion in his den with equal courage, if need be; but he would far rather have shot him at a safe distance than tackled him at such close quarters.

"If I can only manage to pot that old lion with the big head, I'll crow over you for the rest of my life," said the genial, kind-hearted Lockwell, who had been giving the newcomers a description of his formidable size and fierce aspect. "He's more like a lion in heraldry, I tell you, than anything I ever saw in nature; and I verily believe that mane of his will deaden the force of a ball more effectively than the crest of a helmet, or even the breastplate of a French cuirassier."

“I only hope he’ll give me the chance of proving it,” said Jack Manners; “methinks my ‘Roaring Billy’ ” (that was his pet name for the heavy Lancaster rifle he used) “will find out a weak chink in his armour; aye, and give him a bad headache too, if it hits him in the right quarter.”

The Mantatees had lived among lions; and possessing large herds of cattle in their own country, they were well skilled in forming strong palisade fences, such as no lion could storm from without, nor bullock break through from within. A few hours only sufficed for this operation; the Bakones lent a willing hand, cut and carried the stakes, twisted rod-bands over a fire till they became supple and tough as cables, and, finally, helped to wattle and secure the whole, till a circular fence had been formed high and strong as a castle wall.

Within this inclosure were gathered, a full hour before nightfall, at least a score of Mantatees, as many oxen, and half-a-dozen Hottentot drivers, all of whom rested there with as little dread of invasion from the lions as if they had been quartered in Capetown. Nevertheless, many were the hints given

from without that the fence was being closely reconnoitered during the livelong night; and several were the shots fired in response and at random, from Frank's waggon, though with no effect in the dark beyond eliciting a roar of defiance from the angry and watchful foe.

For the last few mornings Frank and Lockwell had eaten their breakfast in the utmost discomfort within the waggon; but now, reinforced as they were by such strong support, both imagined they should be running but little risk if they bivouacked on the ground near the two waggons, and there enjoy that social meal in company with their friends.

Accordingly, under the shade of a wide-spreading mimosa, a bountiful supply of cutlets and steaks, hissing on the embers of a clear fire, soon emitted so savoury an odour that the air was impregnated by it far and wide; while, hard by on the sod, such as it was, the four Anglians sat in perfect contentment, regaling on the delicacies of an African forest with the zest of hunters, requiring no sauce to give them an appetite. A couple of swarthy Hottentots, who by-the-

by had piled their long guns near them, cooked and waited on the party, doing their work as handily as if they had been trained to it in a French restaurant.

To "top up" with a pipe is undoubtedly a comforting finale to a morning meal; and as Maltby, who was a cloud-compeller of no ordinary power, had just lighted his briar, volumes of blue smoke were now issuing from his lips and curling in fantastic wreaths round the crown of his head. Hitherto, perhaps, his thoughts had been too intent upon the dainty viands on which he had been feasting; for as his eye caught sight of the two long guns brought by the Hottentots, one of which was his tottie or after-rider, it at once occurred to him that, with the exception of Jack Manners' rifle, there was not within reach another weapon which could be instantly snatched up and used in case of emergency. Utterly fearless though he was, nay, foolhardy in the face of danger, a sense of insecurity crept over him as he said, "Well done, Jack; you, I see, are the only soldier among us; ready to meet the enemy, come he when or how he will."

“‘Ready, aye, ready;’ the motto of the Napiers is the one which every man should adopt on a campaign like this,” replied Manners; “and forewarned as we have been by Frank’s disasters, it behoves us at least to be forearmed, lest we too should suffer the like loss.”

“Spoken like a book, Jack,” said Maltby, patting him on the shoulder with his uninjured hand. “We certainly are a pack of fools not to have every man his rifle by his side.”

He had scarcely finished speaking when the roar of a lion in their very midst made them start asunder like broken bows; simultaneously, too, before they could rise to their legs, the beast bounded into their circle, and seizing Lockwell by the back, stood over him in an attitude of the grandest majesty.

Quick as lightning Jack Manners grasped his rifle, and sent a ball into him with equal celerity, but apparently without doing the lion much damage. He dropped, however, his prey, and still keeping his claws upon him, glared around defiantly on the rest of the party.

Frank, who by this time had sprung into the waggon, snatched up his rifle, and, at the imminent risk of hitting Lockwell, touched the trigger, and drove a ball crashing into the lion's head.

Still the forest king stood his ground and held his own right royally, as if determined not to relinquish the prey; when at that juncture Maltby, catching hold of his Tottie, dragged him up by main force with his long gun close to the lion, which seemed undecided whether to spring on these two, or keep to his first prey. Darkie, who was more afraid of his master than the lion, then took a steady aim—Maltby pointing out with his stick the exact spot at which he should fire—touched the trigger, and rolled the grand beast over, dead upon the spot.

Lockwell's back, on being stripped, presented a frightful spectacle; still, being a tolerably healthy subject, and almost a total abstainer from alcoholic liquors, the lacerations were attended with no serious inflammation, and in the course of a few weeks some ugly scars alone remained to tell the

tale. However, that encounter, and the injury sustained by Maltby, brought their campaign in the forest to a somewhat abrupt end; and by slow stages, the team of oxen being divided between the two waggon, the whole party returned without any further dangerous adventure to their respective posts.

It was the big-headed lion they had killed; and on examining the mouth it was found that all the small teeth in front were worn down to the gums; the holders, too, though jagged and blunted, were of enormous size, and confirmed to a certain extent the statement of a Bakone chief, who declared he had known that lion as long as he could remember; and that he had carried off more old men and women of their tribe than the most fatal malady. There was consequently no little joy manifested by the natives on discovering, by the token of his broken teeth and grand head, his mane and all being bigger than that of a buffalo, that the great enemy of their lives had been slain. They danced, they sang, they whooped over the fallen tyrant, as if they were going mad with delight at the liberty they now hoped to enjoy.

Years after that event, Lockwell's regiment being quartered in a garrison town on the south coast of England, a ball, attended by a large party of officers, naval and military, took place at the chief hotel, and, as usual, was kept up to a late hour of the morning watch. The tea and accompaniments administered at midnight had long been forgotten by the men who had taken a prominent part in the dance; so a supper of grilled bones and devilled biscuits being proposed, some eighteen or twenty gentlemen sat down to it, and finished off their symposium with hunting songs and many a wassail bowl.

Gayest of the gay was poor Lockwell; of all men, as before stated, the most genial and light-hearted on such occasions. His adventure with the lion was of course known to all present; and although on that subject he had always shown a certain reserve, he was now induced by a general request, which his good nature could not resist, to exhibit the scars on his back, and to compare them with those of another gentleman in the room, who had been carried by a tiger into a jungle and there frightfully mauled.

The latter wore habitually inside his vest a stiff cork jacket, which, from the injury he had sustained, acted as a permanent support to his dorsal column. Alas! that very jacket proved more merciless than the tiger's jaws, and as fatal to the poor fellow as the tunic of Nessus, the centaur, to Hercules of old. Not long after the exhibition above referred to, he was invited to take a cruise in a friend's yacht, stationed at a small seaport on the same coast, the party on board consisting of four gentlemen only, including our friend of the cork jacket.

The yacht, by no means a large one, carried a press of canvas, and the main sheet being probably belayed, she was suddenly struck by a squall from the high land, caught aback, and before they could let go the sheet, went down in twenty fathoms of water.

All on board were drowned there and then, except the unfortunate gentleman in the cork jacket; but for him was reserved a far more dreadful doom—perhaps as dreadful a one as was ever recorded in the history of wrecks. Sustained from sinking by the buoyancy of

the cork, he drifted and drifted with the tide, now doubtless sighting a sail at a short distance off, but too far to hail her, and now an hungered and chilled to the marrow, borne eastwards and onwards into Swanage Bay, a distance of eighty or ninety miles; where, after many days, he was found, head and shoulders out of water, but all below a bare skeleton. He had probably divested himself of his nether garments, and so soon as he was dead, the dog-fish had fed on him, and picked off his flesh to the very bone.

Better the tiger had made short work of him, than that he should have suffered a death so cruel and so frightfully protracted; but, "*Dûs aliter visum.*"

The country round the frontier station to which Frank was doomed, presented for many a league so arid and barren a surface that, beyond antelope, ostrich, and quagga, bigger game was rarely to be found. Stunted mimosa bushes formed the sole and scanty cover of the sandy plains; while from the baked stony ground, coated with quartz and granite, oozed here and there, but at wide intervals, a fountain so bitter and so impreg-

nated with saltpetre that no vegetation could grow and thrive in such a soil. Priceless, indeed, was the treasure of a pure well, so rarely to be met with in that thirsty land.

It may well be imagined, therefore, that Frank's spirits, no longer cheered by the company of his friend Lockwell, nor able to enjoy the wild excitement of hunting big game, should flag under the dull monotony of this dreary, inactive outpost life. For more than four months, however, he endured it with the fortitude of a martyr; and then, to his unspeakable relief, came the welcome news that his regiment was ordered home, and that he must pack up and join it at Capetown without delay.

A packet of letters awaited his arrival at head-quarters; among them several—which almost startled him—bearing the well-known handwriting of Mary Cornish. "She could not have received that letter of mine," he said to himself, as he read and re-read her correspondence, all teeming with tenderness and love; not one word could he detect as implying a doubt of his loyalty; not a syllable to show that the long silence he had

observed by not writing to her had wrought the slightest change in her feelings towards him.

Then did a sense of shame sweep over him, as a thunder-cloud darkens the sky; but it passed away, almost as rapidly as it came, when his thoughts reverted to the tyrant of his early life, the odious man who, so far as he knew, would probably be, if he was not already, master of Heathercote—and, in that case, step-father to Mary Cornish. No! that would be a connection too hateful for him to contemplate; better bear the mark of Cain than submit to it.

With this feeling strong as death upon him, he crumpled up the letters into one mass and tossed them precipitately into the fire. "There!" he said; "kindle up that. I've gone once through the pain and penalty of extinguishing the flame in this heart of mine, and I should be a fool indeed if I suffered it to be kindled there again. Ashes to ashes! there, you're dead now, and so is my love."

A bright blaze was the almost instantaneous response to this sad address; but as he stood gazing half vacantly, half regretfully on the

burning mass, now expanding through the heat of the fire and being rapidly consumed, he became aware that, in his haste, he had also cast in a letter of his father's, the handwriting of which he distinctly recognized as it flared up and perished in the flames.

Alas! had that letter been read, matters might have taken a very different turn, and the idol he had so painfully put away might have again been restored to the innermost niche of his heart. Not only had his father not mentioned Dr. Twigg's name, but had expressed his fervent delight on informing him that his old friend Barker was about to be married to the fair widow of Heathercote; and, as the connection would place her in a very different position from that she had hitherto occupied, Lady Susan and himself intended taking an early opportunity of calling and cultivating her acquaintance. The letter then went on to say that he had already met the young lady at Barker's house, and, being charmed with the simplicity of her manner and sweet face, he owned himself fairly disarmed, and would offer no further objection to Frank's marriage with so lovable a girl;

adding, too, that the sooner it followed Barker's affair, the better he should be pleased.

The voyage home was a long and tedious one—the transport-ship, the rolling old *Vulcan*, having been detained by contrary winds for some weeks at Madeira; when at length, by the skilful and courageous conduct of her captain, she managed to fetch Plymouth, the regiment was safely landed at that port. By the kindness of his commanding officer, Frank's leave was granted to him at once; so, hurrying off to Jackman's stables, he jumped upon a hack, and starting straight for Watercombe, arrived there just as dinner was going on the table.

He had gone forth from the paternal roof a mere stripling, with a fresh, comely countenance, more like a girl's than a boy's; his height, too, was then below the ordinary standard of his contemporaries, and, as every one prognosticated, he bid fair to ride under ten stone for many a year to come. But now the Squire and Lady Susan were quite taken aback, and for some seconds failed to recognize the fine, broad-shouldered, stalwart man

who, with bronzed face, light moustache, and soldierly mien, stalked into the room behind Matthews, without being announced by that official.

It was a warm meeting on all sides; a welcome home such as they only can understand who have experienced the like happiness. Even Lady Susan's habitually chilly manner gave way, and finally thawed into a flood of tears, as she hugged her only child in her arms, and thanked God for his safe return.

The kennel, the stables, Ben Head, the huntsman, and Tom French seemed to be the sole topics of interest to which Frank and his father devoted their conversation during the whole course of dinner and dessert; Lady Susan in vain endeavouring, when a pause ensued, to put in a word edgeways on any other subject. At length, growing weary of the never-ending horse-and-hound talk, and utterly failing to bring it to a close by contradicting or correcting the Squire as he answered Frank's numerous questions about men and hounds, her ladyship rose from the table and retired for the night.

“Well, Frank,” said his father, so soon as the coast was clear, “weren’t you greatly interested to hear of the fair widow’s engagement? She is certainly going to do a good thing for herself by marrying so sensible and honourable a man. Then, if she live, as I expect she will, at Buckbury, Heathercote would be the place of all others for you—a snug, little hunting-box on the edge of the moor, and within easy reach of all our best meets. Why, Frank, you’ll be as happy as a prince there.”

“No, father! Mrs. Cornish may marry that man if she likes; but I’d rather die than live at Heathercote in that case. The very proximity of such a neighbour would be an insurmountable bar to it.”

The Squire looked utterly astounded: his friend Barker being irreproachable, and a man, as he believed, without an enemy in the world, how could he possibly have given Frank such dire offence? There must be a mistake somewhere. Still, as it was his son’s first night at home after his long absence, he would not allude further now to the subject, lest it should lead to an angry discussion

between them ; so, bridling his tongue as he best could, the Squire simply said, " Well, Frank, we'll talk that matter over another time ; but now let's hear some of your African adventures. You've been in the bush, and doubtless have a yarn or two to spin on that point."

Great was Frank's relief at this proposal ; for, whatever arguments his father might have used, persuasive or denunciatory, he had made up his mind to objure the hateful connection which he believed Mrs. Cornish was about to form ; and, at whatever cost, to repudiate Dr. Twigg.

He then entered into a minute and graphic description of the hair-breadth escape of Lockwell, rescued by the heroism of Maltby from the very jaws of a lion ; of the latter's fight with the lioness and his attempt to cram his barrels down the animal's throat ; and above all, of the wonderful colony of Bakones living, beyond the lions' reach, in well-constructed huts among the branches of the baobab tree. So interested was the Squire by these tales that no further allusion was made that night to Heathercote or its belongings.

But, the next morning, matters assumed a very different aspect. Frank had risen early, and hurrying off to the kennel, had passed a couple of happy hours in Ben Head and Tom French's company; while the former drew the hounds, one by one, and described the blood and distinctive quality of every individual hound. Frank was late for breakfast; but he would have remained on the flags an hour or two longer without feeling the want or even remembering the necessity of attending that meal, if Ben had not reminded him that, in all probability, the Squire would be expecting to see him at his "table-board."

This proved to be just the case. Mr. Raleigh, who stood at a bow window commanding the footpath leading to the kennel, was evidently waiting for his son, and could not help observing the utter unconcern evinced by him with respect to Heathercote, as he watched him leisurely approaching the house, whistling a jaunty air, and apparently as undisturbed by the pangs of love as a newly born child. "Can it be possible," he said to himself, "that he cares not a button

for that charming girl, who has been true as a dove to him, and that, too, for so long a time? No, no! I am loth to believe that a son of mine could be so unfaithful; nay, so dishonourable."

Nor could the Squire at all understand the abhorrence Frank had expressed for, as he supposed, his excellent friend Barker; not having a spark of suspicion that, all the while, he was labouring under a mistake, and that in reality those sentiments of aversion were intended for a very different man. Altogether, the whole matter seemed a mystery beyond the scope of his comprehension.

After breakfast, however, came the explanation; the Squire could contain himself no longer. "Frank," he said, in the old firm tone of former days, "you are off to Heathercote, of course, this morning. Will you ride Chaplet or May-day?"

"Neither, sir, thank you—nor do I intend going to Heathercote just yet. I ought to have informed you that months ago I wrote to Mary Cornish and begged her to consider our engagement at an end."

"You did, Frank! Then, on what ground,

may I ask, did you take that step?" said the Squire, half astounded by the news.

"Simply because I hated the idea of being so nearly connected with Dr. Twigg, the man about to be married to Mary's mother."

"Twigg married to the fair widow? Never, Frank! You have evidently been misinformed on the subject. No, our old friend Barker is to be the happy man. It is he, I am delighted to say, who has won the prize. Twigg, who never had the ghost of a chance, was distanced like a cock-tail in the race—at least, so I am informed by Lady Susan, who gets all this gossip from her own maid."

Frank's eyes absolutely dilated with surprise, as he listened, with mixed feelings of pleasure and remorse, to his father's statement—one so contrary to that he had received from Llewellyn Powell, on which he had acted, as he now found, with such rash and inexcusable precipitancy. "Fool that I was," he said, "not to listen to my friend Lockwell's advice: for by writing that letter I have both inflicted and suffered wounds that will probably carry their scars to the grave!"

"You certainly have made a sad hash of it," continued his father, in a tone of bitter disappointment; for, notwithstanding the reluctant consent he had formerly given to Frank's engagement, he had now, from personal acquaintance with Mary, formed the highest opinion of her gentle ways, her good sense, and sterling character. In fact, he had been frequently heard to acknowledge her, with no little pride, as his future charming daughter-in-law.

"You may ride a horse to death, Frank, before you again meet a girl like Mary Cornish. I saw her only a few days ago at Waldron Barker's, and I doubt much if she knew it then—at all events her manner was unchanged, and she gave me no hint of the break between you. Come, my boy, ride over to Heathercote and see how the land lies."

"I'd rather not, sir," said Frank, firmly; "I've cut the tie and undergone the wrench, and now there's an end on't. No man should marry on the dregs of a passion."

But his father was not the man to give up a scheme readily, when he had once set

his heart on it; believing, too, that Frank's character was at stake, his high principle and chivalrous notions of honour prompted him to use every argument he could think of to bring about the engagement again. At length, having discovered through Barker that no such letter as his son had described had ever been received at Heathercote, and that Mary, knowing Frank had gone on a hunting expedition into the wilds of Kaffraria, had expressed no uneasiness at not hearing from him for so long a time, the Squire so far prevailed on Frank that he consented to ride over and pay the ladies a visit in company with his father.

But it was a cold, formal affair on Frank's part; he had, as he had stated, quenched the flame, and now it would not be resuscitated; had mastered the passion and expelled it from its once strong hold, never again to return, in like form, to direct and control every thought of his soul. Nor did the tenderness, the love, the rapturous joy, too visibly expressed by Mary on first seeing him, affect in the slightest degree the air of indifference he maintained throughout the interview. It

seemed, indeed, as if his whole nature had been chilled by some hardening process ; just as molten iron is converted into steel.

Had the earth yawned beneath her feet, and closed upon her at that moment, Mary would have been thankful ; but no ! further trials are in store for her, and the bitter cup must be drained to the very dregs.

CHAPTER XI.

“ And will I see his face again ?
And will I hear him speak ?
I’m downright dizzy wi’ the thought ;
In troth, I’m like to greet.”

MICKLE.

NOTWITHSTANDING a somewhat catching and inclement autumn in that dampest of all countries, the southern slopes of Dartmoor, the corn at last had been generally well saved, and cub-hunting had commenced in earnest throughout the district. Happily, too, since the reclamation of Tom French from his vulpecidal ways, few coverts might now be said to lack a fox ; not the fat, game-pampered brute too often met with nowadays, possessing neither muscle nor knowledge of the country ; but a flying dragon, long and lean as a half-starved wolf, and wild as the winds of his native moor ; ay, and fit to cope with the

stoutest blood that ever occupied the benches of a kennel.

The entry, too, of which the Squire might be justly proud, augured well for the coming season; claiming, as many of the young hounds now could, a direct descent from the famous Wellington, a Beaufort badger-pie, whose progeny had become no less distinguished for their power of nose and stout enduring qualities than for the dash and desperate ardour they displayed in chase.

Such being the blood, then, infused into and commingled with the old stag-hound strain of the Watercombe kennels, it was no wonder that a better-bred animal than the honest Devonshire packhorse should at once be needed to live with the Squire's hounds; for when, as it frequently happened, the meet was within reach of the moor, and the scent proved to be favourable, hopeless indeed was the case of him whose steed lacked the pace and staying power of the nobler race. Wild foxes and fast hounds, it became painfully evident, were not to be followed in the old-fashioned way, and the man who would see the brilliant episodes and ever-varying

passages of a run over that open grassy moor could not hope to gratify his ambition except he were carried by a bit of blood. Consequently, among the gentlemen of the hunt, horses of a better stamp were soon observable at the cover-side; nor were a few of the farmers slow to follow their example, perceiving, with an eye to business as well as pleasure, that, when better mounted, not only would they be able to see more sport, but to realize better prices for the horses that carried them. And thus was a signal service conferred on the whole community by the introduction of this new blood into the Watercombe kennels; for to it was justly ascribed the improvement that so perceptibly took place in the quality of the horses throughout the length and breadth of that forest land.

Deeply mortified by Frank's conduct towards Mary Cornish, which he had not scrupled to denounce as at once heartless and dishonourable, the Squire had maintained so cold a reserve towards his son, not only at home, but in the hunting field, that at length Frank could endure it no longer. A fit of remorse, too, had seized him on hearing from

Lady Susan that his old friend Host had been sent for to see Mary, whom he had found in a state of pitiable depression and seriously ill, her ladyship remarking to her son, with a sarcastic smile, that she concluded he was only acting up to that code of honour he had so well studied at Buckbury School.

So that, altogether, Frank found it anything but a bed of roses on which he was compelled to lie during his stay at Watercombe; nor, even with the hounds, could he shake off the ever-present uncomfortable conviction that, by not fulfilling his vows, he had probably broken the heart of a true and devoted woman. Heavier than usual had this feeling been weighing upon him, when one day, on his return from hunting, wet, wearied, and dispirited by a long and fruitless chase, he re-opened the unwelcome subject before his father, and thus unburdened his mind.

“I own, father,” he said, with an air of unmistakable dejection, “that I have done Mary a great injustice, and deservedly offended you. My conscience tells me so too truly; but I am now ready to make the only

reparation in my power, that is, to marry her on the following conditions, namely, that after the ceremony we part at the church door."

"Mary Cornish, or I'm much mistaken, has far too independent a spirit to comply with such terms," said his father, indignantly. "What, Frank, swear to protect her one moment and repudiate her the next! A monstrous proposal; and she, too, so good and so gentle! No, Frank, you can't treat the poor girl in so unmanly a way! You'll think better of it, I hope, before the time comes."

Frank made no answer, but from a certain inflexibility of purpose now visible on his face—an expression he was wont to exhibit when cramming an awkward horse at a big fence—his father rightly inferred that, for the present at least, he had better press the subject no further. However, the next morning, directly after breakfast, the Squire, whose thoughts had been exclusively occupied by Frank's concession and the unnatural terms appended to it, mounted his favourite hack, May-day, at the door, and started off for

Buckbury; his object being to consult his friend Waldron Barker as to the best mode of bringing the young people together, and of dissuading Frank from so cruel an act as deserting his bride at the church door.

Luckily, the Parson was at home, and as he had been utterly at a loss to account for Frank's conduct towards Mary, and had observed with tender solicitude that, owing to it, the girl's health had fairly broken down, he gladly welcomed the mission on which the Squire had come.

"He'll give way, depend upon it," he said, confidently. "Church door, indeed! Only let the knot be tied, and he will be more than mortal if he can resist the charms of so sweet a bride."

"Well, I devoutly hope that may be so; but the boy has an iron will of his own," replied Raleigh, "as I know to my cost. Then, again, I doubt much if Mary will ever consent to so unnatural an arrangement. We are reckoning, Barker, without our host, I fear."

"I apprehend no difficulty on that score," said the Parson. "Mary has ever regarded

Frank as her affianced husband, and, in spite of his conduct, loves him still as much as ever. Besides, let the wedding be fixed, as if by accident, on the very day his leave expires, and the call of duty, if he holds to his purpose of deserting her at the church door, will at least serve as a plausible reason for his immediate return to his regiment. But leave it all to me, Squire; I'll talk to the widow, and with her help I entertain no fear of failure whatever."

"So be it," said Raleigh, elated by his friend's suggestion, and the confidence he expressed in its ultimate success. "In the mean time I'll pave the way for you by urging Frank to write Mary a letter, in which he shall beg forgiveness for his past conduct, and intimate a wish to fulfil his promise without delay."

Accordingly, the two gentlemen having so far settled their plans, set to work with all diligence to carry them into effect. Nor did Frank's father find much difficulty in persuading him to write to Mary and express his unfeigned regret at having caused her a moment's pain, adding, moreover, that he was

now prepared to fulfil his engagement to the letter and marry her forthwith. But, against all argument, he avowed his unalterable intention of quitting her at the church door.

A sadder and far more difficult task was that of Barker to prevail on Mary to accept those bitter terms; nor for some time could she be brought to believe either that Frank had suggested them, or that his old affection would permit him to treat her in so cruel a manner. When, however, she thoroughly understood her position, a sudden change seemed to take her; her depression disappeared, and under the full conviction that, the knot once tied, she would find little difficulty in winning him over from his heartless purpose, she yielded to persuasion and consented to marry him as he proposed.

When the day arrived—the last day of Frank's leave—the ceremony, performed with the utmost simplicity, took place in the presence of a few only of their nearest friends, and on leaving the little church—a chapelry, in fact, attached to Buckbury—intense was the excitement of those few on witnessing a yellow post-chaise drawn up at the church-

yard gate, and Frank, without a word to any one, or even taking a look at his wife, springing into it and starting off alone.

So paralyzing was the shock to Mary that she was carried home senseless from the ground, and for months afterwards remained in a condition of the most pitiable depression, never alluding to her husband, nor taking the slightest interest in the concerns of life.

Time, however, that healer of all woes, brought its balm even to her. Waldron Barker, having married the fair widow, had now become master of Heathercote, and under his paternal guidance the duty of visiting the poor cottagers of the district, and administering to their wants, supplied Mary with a daily occupation at once interesting, useful, and congenial to her taste; while, mounted on May-day, the especial gift of Mr. Raleigh, she enjoyed many a fleet gallop over the moor—a recreation that by degrees invigorated her frame, and brought back the hue of health, the damask to her cheek, in all its former glory.

More than a decade of years had rolled by, unmarked by a single incident worthy of

record, bringing, as they each passed, little or no variety to the daily routine of the Heathercote family, when at length a circumstance occurred which, by a strange turn of the wheel of fortune, threw matters into a new groove, and eventually changed the whole tenor of Mary's life.

The kind-hearted and jovial old Parson, now no longer able to take the strong exercise to which he had once been accustomed, but still enjoying his whack of port—limited, indeed, to a pint, but often increased to a bottle whenever a friend dropped in to dine with him—was seized with an alarming attack of rheumatic gout, which, finally settling in his legs, left him in a state of apparently hopeless decrepitude. Still Host, who attended him, had never despaired: he prescribed the Bath waters, and assured him that, if given a fair trial, they would restore him, as he believed, to perfect health, and that thither he must go as soon as he was able to bear the fatigue of so long a journey.

Accordingly, a suitable house having been secured for them within a short distance of

the Pump-room, Heathercote was shut up, and the whole family, travelling of necessity by easy stages, owing to the suffering condition of the invalid, reached the then still fashionable city on the evening of the fourth day. A peal from the abbey bells greeted their arrival, and before they had been located twenty-four hours at Nassau House, in Orange Grove, the Master of the Ceremonies, learning for whom the bells had been rung, left his cards, with a polite invitation that Mr. Barker and his party would honour the weekly balls and concerts at the Assembly Rooms with their company.

They did not, however, enter into much gaiety, Barker's time being more sensibly devoted to the regular business of bathing and taking the waters, by which, as his physician promised him, he hoped for a speedy restoration to health; while Mary, who had brought May-day with her, far preferred a gallop over the fine elastic turf of Lansdown, or an occasional day with the Beaufort Hounds, to mingling with the pack of idlers, *ennui*-dispellers, and fortune-hunters that crowded

the Pump-room and other places of public resort.

When equipped for riding in her blue habit and broad Spanish hat, though now somewhat past her *première jeunesse*, Mary, if possible, was looking handsomer than ever; for, in addition to her finely cut features and exquisite complexion, her figure, though slender-waisted, had become magnificently developed. Still, winningly sweet as was her smile, there was at times just a tinge of sadness in its expression which even intensified the attraction created by her uncommon face. Not a whisper, however, was heard of its latent cause, nor was the sorrow of her heart suspected by a human being beyond those of her own household.

They had now been more than six weeks in Bath; and already the waters having done wonders for Barker's limbs, which were fast regaining their wonted power of locomotion, he expressed a longing wish to return to Devonshire in the course of a few days. By the advice of his physician, however, he reluctantly consented to remain and take the waters for another fortnight. During that

period it so happened that a well-known company of London actors, including a celebrated opera dancer, made their appearance on the Bath boards, and attracted a large assemblage nightly to the fashionable and pretty little theatre.

Now Mary had never yet witnessed a theatrical performance; nor indeed had she ever entered a theatre, except on that memorable occasion at Oxford, when, nearly fifteen years before, she had gone to the Sheldon Theatre in company with one whose name was now never mentioned by her family, but the remembrance of whom was still cherished by her as the sacred fire by a Roman Vestal.

"I should like amazingly to see this charming comedy acted," said Barker, coming home from the Pump-room and pulling out a playbill announcing the performance of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." "What say you, ladies; shall we take a box for four, and ask your old Scotch friend, Lady Glentulchan, to accompany us?"

"That would be a most delightful treat," said Mrs. Barker and Mary in one voice. "Lady Glentulchan, too, would, I'm sure,

thoroughly enjoy it," continued the latter ;
"for I heard her say, only last evening, she
had never been to a theatre in her life : so
pray ask her."

On the following night, therefore, a small
private box having been secured, the party of
four repaired to the theatre and witnessed
that exquisite creation of genius, "A Mid-
summer Night's Dream," unquestionably the
most purely poetical and imaginative of all
the great author's works. The fourth act
had commenced, and Theseus was describing
to Hippolyta the character of his Spartan
hounds—

" ———— their heads are hung,
With ears that sweep away the morning dew ;
Crook-knee'd and dew-lap'd like Thessalian bulls ;
Slow in pursuit, but match'd in mouth like bells,
Each under each. A cry more tuneable
Was never holla'd to, nor cheer'd with horn,"

when some commotion was caused on the
opposite side of the theatre by the late
arrival of a gentleman who, having taken
a front seat overhanging the stage, was
politely requesting the occupants between
him and it to rise, in order that he might
pass on to his own place.

The attitude of the new comer, evidently a handsome military man, and the murmurs of the unseated, intent upon the play, to which the gentleman seemed to give but little heed, attracted, of course, very general attention, and from all parts of the theatre glasses were turned in that direction to take a look at the unwelcome interrupter of so interesting a scene.

Mary, among others, lifted her glass, and for some seconds her gaze appeared to be riveted on the stranger. There was something about him so like one who had been long enshrined in her memory, and whose image, wherever he might be, was never absent from her thoughts, that the agitation she felt became almost too painful to be endured.

Had Oberon and Titania been real fairies, they would scarcely have been favoured with another look from Mary; but over and over again was her glass levelled nervously in the direction of the opposite box, and the more she looked, the more convinced she became that the man was no other than Frank, her own husband.

He, however, never once turned his eyes in her direction. He had come down from London in pursuit of the opera dancer, the young and beautiful artiste who was now pirouetting under his gaze with infinite grace and agility. Nor could Mary, in consequence, obtain a front view of his face, which, from its position, and the opera-glass he held continuously to his eyes, kept her in such a strain of suspense and anxiety that, if Lady Glentulchan had not abruptly risen to depart, she would probably have yielded to the fainting sensation that now crept, like a chill, through her whole frame.

The prim, old-fashioned Scotch lady, a true type of the Puritans, had been growing momentarily more and more fidgety as she viewed with half-averted eyes the sparkling *danseuse* displaying her matchless and apparently unclad limbs to the public, and, with unabashed air, bounding over the stage with the ease and elegance of a gazelle.

Lady Glentulchan could endure it no longer. She had ejaculated, "Herodias' ain dochter," more than once, audibly; and now

she rose in haste, twicking Mary by her dress, and saying aloud, "Ech, lassie; let's be ganging; this is nae place for daisent folk."

Roars of laughter from some gentlemen in the adjoining box greeted this speech, the drollery of which, for the moment, had the happy effect of turning Mary's thoughts from the painful suspense in which they had been held. She then rose, and, following Lady Glentulchan, quitted the theatre.

The military man, who in truth was Frank Raleigh, now promoted to the brevet rank of general, maintained his seat to the last; but then, soon after, had the mortification of finding that the fair *danseuse* had been accompanied from town by another gentleman, for whom she made no secret of showing a most decided partiality. In no particular good-humour, he resolved to return to town forthwith, but, while waiting for the coach, occupied himself in turning over the Visitors' Book by way of something to do, and there lighted on the names of Mr. and Mrs. Waldron Barker and Mrs. Raleigh.

“This,” he said, putting his finger on the last name, “must be my wife—this the woman I once so loved, and then so cruelly deserted.” Then, stung by a sense of shame and remorse, he sat down and wrote the following note:—
“M.-General Raleigh presents his compliments to Mrs. Raleigh, and will be happy to wait on her if she will permit him to do so.”

The answer came directly:—“Mrs. Raleigh presents her compliments to the General, and will be very happy to see him.”

They met and never parted again. Mary won back the love that had once been hers—the love that in its former intensity and purity had never been given to another woman.

Waldron Barker having resigned the living of Buckbury in favour of Llewellyn Powell, and vacated Heathercote for his own ancestral home, to it the happy couple retired; and there, within easy reach of his father’s kennels and the best of the moorland meets, Frank and his wife, soon blessed with a young family, were permitted to enjoy the noontide

of their lives, not, perhaps, in uninterrupted sunshine, but certainly with as few shadows as darken the days of the most favoured of men.

On the death of his father, at an advanced age, Frank took possession of Watercombe, but, owing to the heavy mortgage with which it was encumbered, and the post-obits he had given to Skinner, the Oxford money-lender, he was strongly urged by his man of business to adopt at once a rigid course of retrenchment, and especially to give up his hounds. Great was his quandary at this prospect, and many were the schemes he devised with a view to retaining the pack that, for so many generations, had been handed down as an heir-loom, inseparable from the inheritance of Watercombe.

Those hounds, now so perfect, were the joy and pride of his life; and, "rather than part with them," as he told Mr. Whiteman, "he'd cut down every stick on the estate."

"No, General, that would never do," pointed out the agent; "if you *will* keep on the hounds, far better take a subscription from

the country than denude the estate of its grand timber and give it the aspect of a settler's clearance in the Far West."

The argument, however, was of no avail; the General would not hear of a subscription, and ordered Whiteman forthwith to engage a body of men, qualified to bark and fell fifty acres of timber, in the forthcoming spring, declaring he would make a clean sweep of it before he would part with his dear hounds, or ask the country for a single shilling.

That winter brought many changes in and around Watercombe, and before the first primrose,

"Nursed in whirling storms
And cradled in the winds,"

gave promise of the coming spring, the heavy news of Waldron Barker's death reached Watercombe, and brought the hunting to a close soon after Christmas.

It may be the old saying of a Cornish wrecker, intent upon the harvest of a storm on his own wild coast, that "It's an ill wind that blows no luck;" or it may be the saying of some needy landed

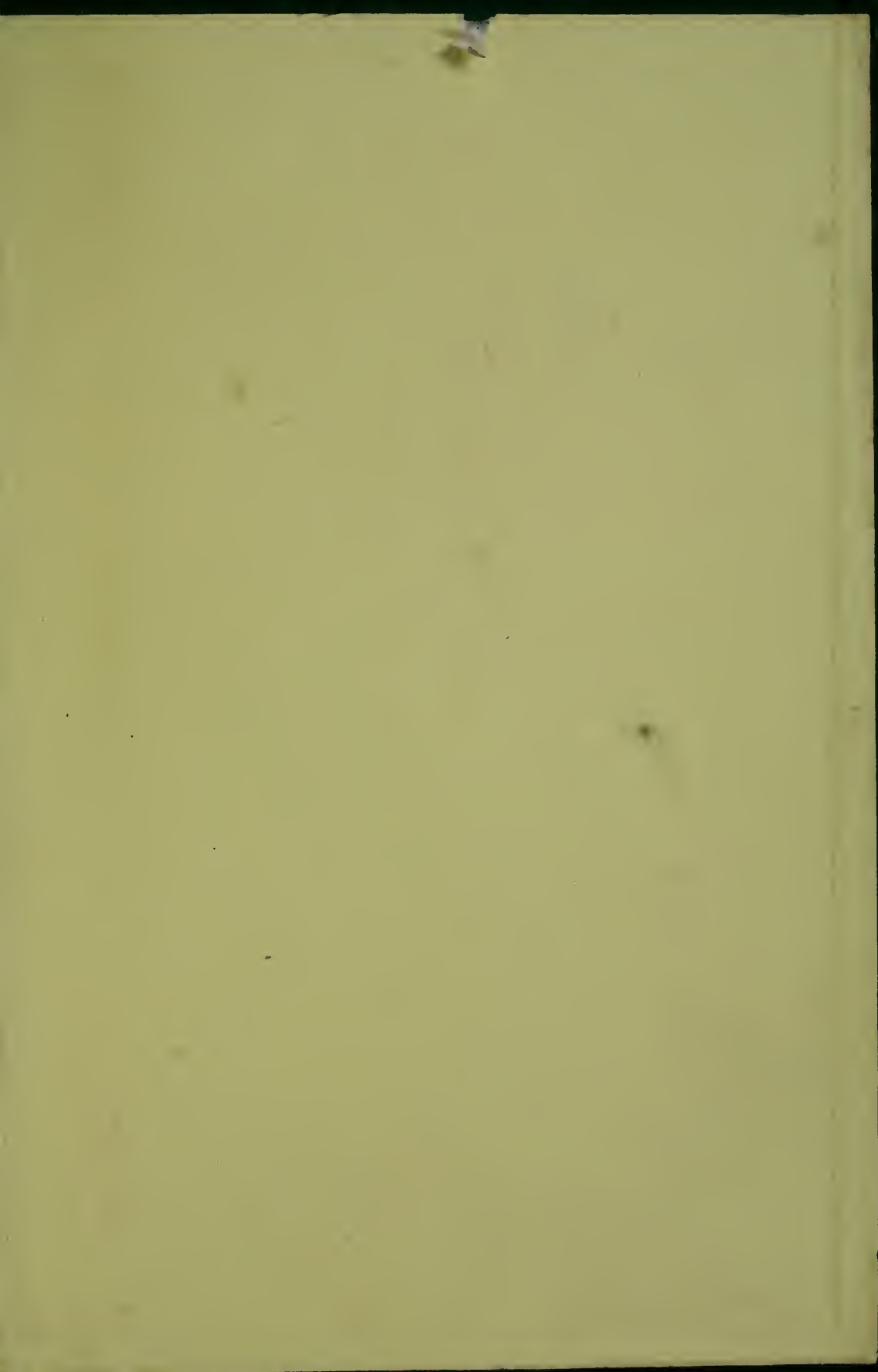
proprietor, befriended by a gale of wind, which knocks down the hereditary timber the law forbids him to cut. Whatever may be the origin of the proverb, its truth was fully exemplified in the case of Waldron Barker. Living to be of use to his fellow-creatures, the rich and the poor mourned him alike; for all felt they had lost a friend who could not be replaced. Even in death, proof remained that his loving heart had largely provided for the wants of others; and if the tears of many a poor widow and orphan "bedewed his cold graveside," they were at least cheered soon after by finding that in his will he had bequeathed a large sum to the poor of his parish for ever.

But theirs was a mere bagatelle compared with the benefit that accrued to Frank and Mary by the fall of that stately tree; for to them were left not only the whole of the landed property, with extensive manorial rights, but a large sum of money, sufficiently large to pay off the debt on Watercombe and all the Oxford post-obits; that it should be so applied being the recorded wish of the testator.

The hewers of wood received orders forthwith to stay their hands; and from that day, not less to the gratification of Frank than to his whole country, never a word more was heard about giving up the Watercombe hounds.

THE END.





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